

A REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND ART

# *Horizon*

EDITED BY CYRIL CONNOLLY

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*W. H. AUDEN*  
**UNDER SIRIUS**

Yes, these are the dog-days, Fortunatus:  
The heather lies limp and dead  
On the mountain, the baltering torrent  
Shrunk to a soodling thread;  
Rusty the spears of the legion, unshaven its captain,  
Vacant the scholar's brain  
Under his great hat,  
Drug as she may, the Sibyl utters  
A gush of table-chat:

And you yourself with a head-cold and upset stomach,  
Lying in bed till noon,  
Your bills unpaid, your much advertised  
Epic not yet begun,  
Are a sufferer too. All day, you tell us, you wish  
Some earthquake would astonish  
Or the wind of the Comforter's wing  
Unlock the prisons and translate  
The slipshod gathering.

And last night, you say, you dreamed of that bright blue  
morning,  
The hawthorn hedges in bloom,  
When serene in their ivory vessels,  
The three wise Maries come,  
Sossing through seamless waters, piloted in  
By sea-horse and fluent dolphin:  
Ah! how the cannons roar,  
How jocular the bells as They  
Indulge the peccant shore.

It is natural to hope and pious, of course, to believe  
That all in the end shall be well,  
But first of all, remember,  
So the Sacred Books foretell,  
The rotten fruit shall be shaken. Would your hope make sense  
If today were that moment of silence  
Before it break and drown  
When the insurrected eagle hangs  
Over the sleeping town?

How will you look and what will you do when the basalt  
Tombs of the sorcerers shatter  
And their guardian megalopods  
Come after you pitter-patter?  
How will you answer when from their qualming spring  
The immortal nymphs fly shrieking  
And out of the open sky  
The pantocratic riddle breaks;—  
'Who are you and why?'

For when in a carol under the apple-trees  
The reborn featly dance,  
There will also, Fortunatus,  
Be those who refused their chance,  
Now pottering shades, querulous beside the salt-pits,  
And mawkish in their wits,  
To whom these dull dog-days  
Between event seem crowned with olive  
And golden with self-praise.



W. H. AUDEN

## CATTIVO TEMPO

Sirocco brings the minor devils:  
A slamming of doors  
At four in the morning  
Announces that they are back,  
Grown insolent and fat  
On cheesy literature  
And corny dramas,  
Nibbar, demon  
Of ga-ga and betise,  
Tubevillus, demon  
Of gossip and spite.

Nibbar to the writing-room  
Plausibly to whisper  
The nearly fine,  
The almost true;  
Beware of him, poet,  
Lest, reading over  
Your shoulder, he find  
What makes him glad,  
The manner arch  
The meaning blurred,  
The poem bad.

Tubevillus to the dining-room  
Intently to listen,  
Waiting his cue;  
Beware of him, friends,  
Lest the talk at his prompting  
Take the wrong turning,

## HORIZON

The unbated tongue  
In mischief blurt  
The half home truth,  
*The fun turn* ugly,  
The jokes hurt.

Do not underrate them; merely  
To tear up the poem,  
To shut the mouth  
Will defeat neither:  
To have got you alone  
Self-confined to your bedroom  
Manufacturing there  
From lewdness or self-care  
Some whining unmanaged  
Imp of your own,  
That too is their triumph.

The proper riposte is to bore them;  
To scurry the dull pen  
Through dull correspondence,  
To wag the sharp tongue  
In pigeon Italian,  
Asking the socialist  
Barber to guess  
Or the monarchist fishermen to tell  
When the wind will change,  
Outwitting hell  
With human obviousness.

DAVID GASCOYNE

LEON CHESTOV

AFTER TEN YEARS' SILENCE

I

As far as it is possible to judge, there exists at present among the intelligent reading public in England only a dim and confused conception of the significance of Existential Philosophy and its situation in relation to the rest of contemporary thought. It is unlikely however that the confusion that reigns here in people's minds with regard to this philosophic movement is anything like the dense and inextricable confusion regarding it that must by this time have become general in France. Intellectual discursivity, having sensed the menace to itself that a proper understanding of the essential thought of the philosophers who may rightly be described as existential would represent, seems to have found the topic of *Existentialisme* more stimulating than any other to have cropped up in France for a long while and to have set about muddling the crucial issues involved with a dogmatizing polemical gusto such as is fortunately seldom equalled on this side of the Channel. Here, stifling our resentment at being as usual about a decade behind the intellectual development of the rest of Europe, we generally miss the real point, pass on garbled accounts of what it is all supposed to be about and are wearily deprecating in our comments on it.

When I refer here to Existential Philosophy, I should like it to be quite clear from the start that I do not mean this expression to be understood to designate the philosophy associated with the movement headed by the brilliant ex-professor, publicist and playwright Jean-Paul Sartre. If one would form a just estimate of the distance that separates Sartre's *Existentialisme* from the kind of thought that in what I am going to say I shall refer to as existential, one should try to imagine Pascal writing a poetic novel about the gulf that he felt to be yawning at his side all the time towards the end of his life. Existentialism is the post-experimental intellectual exploitation of the experience of existing. The kind of

philosophy that I wish to discuss is actual spiritual activity. Not all that goes on within man is what the Marxists call 'mere reflection'.

Frequently heard and familiar enough though the names of the representatives of Cartesian Existentialism have become, it is extremely seldom that anyone refers to the one great modern thinker who can justly be described as a representative of authentically existential philosophy, Leon Chestov. For every mention of Chestov's name during the ten years that have passed since his death, there have been I should imagine at least five hundred references to Jean-Paul Sartre. While it would be untrue to say that Chestov remains quite unknown in this country, since three books of his have been translated and published here<sup>1</sup>—*Anton Chehov and Other Essays*, with an introduction by Middleton Murry, in 1916, *All Things are Possible*, introduced by D. H. Lawrence, in 1920, and in 1932, introduced by Richard Rees, *In Job's Balances*, a book uniting in one volume several representative short works—it is still necessary to say that this great, profoundly disturbing Russian thinker, whose message for the present time is quite as significant as his friend Berdyaev's, is unjustly neglected and his importance altogether underestimated.

Leon Chestov, exiled after 1920 by the Soviet Polit-bureau-atic revolutionaries to whom his philosophy was insufficiently optimistic to be useful to their purposes, was a Voice Crying in the Wilderness his whole life long. *Vox Clamantis in Deserto* is the sub-title of one of his last works, *Kierkegaard and Existential Philosophy*, published in French translation a year or two before the first appearance of Sartre, who has always resolutely ignored him, though the world described with such long-drawn-out repugnance in his own imaginative works is certainly a desert. It is not surprising, however, that Chestov's voice has remained inaudible to one who has declared, during a discussion of the epistemological foundations of Existentialism, that the Absolute is in Descartes. The Absolute that is to be found in Descartes's Cogito

<sup>1</sup>*Anton Chehov and Other Essays*. Modern Russian Library. Maunsell & Co. Ltd., Dublin and London. 1916.

*All Things are Possible* (The Apotheosis of Groundlessness). Authorized translation by S. S. Koteliensky. London: Martin Secker. 1920.

*In Job's Balances: On the Sources of the Eternal Truths*. Translated by Camilla Coventry and C. A. Macartney. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd. 1932.

is absolute self-sufficiency, and if this produces a desert, Sartre's superb intelligence can still reign supreme in it and immediately reduce to silence all voices crying 'Prepare ye . . . '.

Coming as the most recent successor of two or three of the most original and significant thinkers of the nineteenth century—Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Dostoevsky—Chestov may be considered to have made it possible at present to think of Existential Philosophy as such, that is to say to see it as a distinct current of thought with special distinguishing characteristics and central preoccupations, with a task and destiny to fulfil in the history of the spiritual crisis of Western man in the present age. The *Existentialisme* of Sartre does not belong to this current of thought. It is a perversion of the thought that inspired Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky (the Knight of Faith and the Underground Man) based on a typically French Cartesian misunderstanding of the essence of the special contribution of these solitary individualists to European philosophical speculation. Heidegger's position in relation to this situation is a quite special one, which I cannot begin to discuss here, but it should not be confused with Sartre's, simply on the supposition that they are both 'atheists', as innumerable facile vulgarizers and subtle casuists have attempted to do during the last five or ten years. What critics really mean when they state, as for instance Mr. J. V. Langmead-Casserley does in a recent book, *The Christian in Philosophy* (Faber), that 'in writers like Heidegger and Sartre we are confronted by an existentialism which is specifically atheist', is simply that the assumption of these philosophers is that contemporary man is not a conscious believer in God. To assume this does not make one an atheist; and when Sartre does also announce himself as being specifically an atheist, this is a professional naïveté on his part. The now universal state of human existence cannot be said to be one of continual, profound, everyday faith in the living God. To have real faith in God is not at present natural to man in the world. To be a wholehearted and practically consistent believer is to be an exception to the normal condition of man in the twentieth century. It is the universal, *a priori* condition of human existence that is the subject existentialism undertakes to describe, to begin with, and the exceptions can only have significance in relation to a 'normal' or 'ordinary' state that has been first properly defined and analysed. It becomes clear after the initial examination

of the ordinary state of man's existence has been made that there exists in it a tendency towards something else, which is ordinarily resisted in ways which Heidegger in particular subjects to detailed analysis. This something else is the state which results from a change of the 'ordinary' state of existence into a more highly developed state. The state of the conscious and deliberate atheist and the state of the authentic Christian both represent a higher development of existence than that of the ordinary. The only thing that any existentialist philosopher could be said to set out to convert anyone to is responsible choice. The important point that Sartre misses is that neither belief nor disbelief can be taught to anyone, and atheism, as soon as it becomes specific, is a belief: a belief in the non-existence of the spiritual dimension of reality, resting on a refusal to recognize that there is a Ground of Being.

## II

'Socrates spent the month following his verdict in incessant conversations with his pupils and friends. That is what it is to be a beloved master and to have disciples. You can't even die quietly,' wrote Leon Chestov in 1905, thirty-four years before his own death. 'The best death is really the one which is considered the worst,' he wrote: 'to die alone, in a foreign land, in a poor-house, or, as they say, like a dog under a hedge.'

Chestov did not die in a poor-house, but otherwise he may be said to have achieved this ambition. His only disciple in 1939 was the Roumanian-born Jewish poet and philosopher Benjamin Fondane, who was destined to a death in the gas-chambers at Birkenau six years later. At the end of his life, Chestov was resigned to being neglected or mischievously misinterpreted by his contemporaries, who if ever they referred to him, did so to pour scorn on his crazy 'anti-rationalism', being unable to observe that few thinkers in the history of philosophy have had so realistic a respect for the power of human reason, even though this was a respect tempered by a realization of its limitations and of its hypnotic influence over those whom it enslaves. He did not want disciples—he did not even want to have pupils or a class of students, which for a philosopher in these days is rare. He believed philosophical activity to consist in absolutely undivided truth-seeking, and this he could not reconcile with telling people they

need seek no more, should they happen also to be seeking Truth, but simply attend his classes and pay attention while he told it them, the proper fee at the end of the term, and the maximum amount of lip-service to the importance of his ideas. To adopt the role of a teacher of this kind, would have been altogether in contradiction with the inner position, the adoption of which is a necessary prerequisite of Existential Philosophy, properly so-called. It is perfectly extraordinary how this simple fundamental distinction which makes Existential Philosophy *existential* is still so universally and completely ignored, particularly by professors.

It was not unintentionally that in introducing Leon Chestov I began by referring to his death. In Chestov's philosophical writings the thought of death is like a constant ground-note; death was to him a starting point as well as the ultimate goal for speculative thought. The first and most indispensable prerequisite for whoever would undertake the task of philosophy was for Chestov not the rational faculty or cogitative power, but courage. All advances in the realm of human thought are the result of a victory over fear. The justification of Socratic doubt, which questions the foundedness of all commonly accepted truths as a matter of discipline, is in the realization that we are ever apt to use our faculty of rational thinking less for the purpose of arriving at the truth than for that of protecting ourselves from fear of the unknown.

Chestov addressed his philosophy not to a class of passive students, but to an individual reader, his interlocutor. With regard to the fruitfulness of the normal master-pupil relationship, or what has become in the modern world the normal relationship between teacher and taught, he was from the very beginning completely sceptical; but if he had not had some faith in the possibility and efficacy of communicating real philosophic thought he would hardly have continued to the end of his life to publish books in which an interlocutor is continually stimulated to reconsider the views of other great philosophers as well as his own views of them.

Chestov in many of his works leads his interlocutor through a careful and penetrating analysis of certain of the writings of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Chekhov to the possible recognition of the startling and difficult fact that there exist certain situations and states, such as have to be passed through at least once by all who



are mortal, wherein a man may suddenly have to admit that the ordinary, reassuring truths and assumptions upon which we all base our everyday life and which it might well seem outrageous even to question publicly, are no longer able to satisfy him, but seem to the contrary to have been simply the easily available, conventionally legitimized means whereby men commonly stupefy themselves so as to continue to be able to remain fast asleep even when wide awake and busily occupied in carrying on very competently their no doubt highly important and altogether worth-while daily affairs.

For most of us, this moment of dislocation, of panic, of abrupt unfamiliarity and questionableness of everything hitherto regarded as certain, is throughout our whole lives postponed, evaded, and its possibility and implications absolutely denied and ignored. But as Chestov took pains to make vivid to his interlocutor, with the approach of death, this moment may become increasingly difficult to postpone. For it is in part the moment of fully recognizing the truth of the fact of Death itself, and of its immense enigmatic significance for the whole of the human life that leads to it.

It would be a great mistake to regard Chestov's preoccupation with Death as a gloomy aberration or morbidity; it is in fact a thoroughly normal and healthy preoccupation for a philosopher, and it is the ordinary current attitude to the darker aspect of reality that is morbid. It is generally far too easily forgotten today, in discussions of modern philosophy, that there have been in the history of thought few definitions of philosophy's purpose which more deserve serious attention, the attention of our second thoughts, than the Platonic-Socratic 'preparation in view of death'. Most modern philosophers, restlessly haunted by the ambition of succeeding in the enterprise of making philosophy an important department of the imposing edifice of Materialist Science, or rather the indispensable epistemological handmaid of an authoritative world-hegemony of laboratory and classroom workers and mathematicians, do not care, it would seem, to be reminded of this supposedly nonsensical formulation of the purpose of speculative thought; indeed, they seem unanimously to take it for granted that we should all be inarticulately resigned to being dead already.

In this respect, Heidegger's philosophy is an exception; in it the

way all men regard Death most of the time they are alive, or rather the quasi-universal Western educated habit of evading real seriousness—and an appearance of seriousness is more than almost anything else made to serve to facilitate this evasion—has been treated as the subject of a rigorous, detailed analysis. For Heidegger, resolution-in-view-of-death is an experienced reality that is to be regarded as the necessary foundation of all human life having personal authenticity. Until we have undergone the realization that comes with a moment of the kind I tried to describe just now, we shall be all the time as it were running away from our true self, unable to accept life in its complete seriousness, continually anxious to keep always to the most superficial level of experience where everything is a matter of course and nothing new or difficult ever disturbs the unexceptional monotonously humdrum normality of a mediocre existence.

Martin Heidegger, in making the analysis to be found in *Sein und Zeit* of everyday banality and the inauthentic conception of death that is based on hearsay and clichés and not on a profound personal realization, was partly inspired originally by a story of Tolstoy's, *The Death of Ivan Ilyitch*. It happens that this story was among the later writings of Tolstoy that Chestov examines at some length in his book *The Revelations of Death*, in an essay entitled 'The Last Judgement'. The moral to which Chestov's reflections on Tolstoy's greatest short story led him, he has expressed in what seems to me a rather more cogent form than that given it in that essay, in another of his writings, 'Revolt and Submission', where he says:

'Despite his reason man is a being subject to the power of the moment. And even when he seeks to consider all things *sub specie aeternitatis*, his philosophy is usually *sub specie temporis*—indeed, of the present hour. This is why men reckon so little with death, as though death did not exist. When a man thinks on his dying hour—how do his values and standards change! But death lies in the future, which will not be—so every one feels. And there are many similar things of which one has to remind not only the common herd but also the philosophers who know so much that is superfluous and have forgotten, or have never known, what is most important.'

After I had been reflecting quite recently on these words of Chestov and was beginning to plan the present dissertation, I

happened idly to pick up an anthology of old English poetry, and on the page at which I opened it, this is the poem I found:

‘A good that never satisfies the mind,  
A beauty fading like the April showers,  
A sweet with floods of gall that runs combined,  
A pleasure passing ere the thought made ours,  
An honour that more fickle is than wind,  
A glory at opinion’s frown that lowers,  
A treasury that bankrupt time devours,  
A knowledge than grave ignorance more blind,  
A vain delight our equals to command,  
A style of greatness, in effect a dream,  
A swelling thought of holding sea and land,  
A servile lot, decked with a pompous name  
Are the strange ends we toil for here below  
Till wisest death makes us our errors know.’

Several of the fourteen lines of this sonnet of Drummond of Hawthornden, seem to me to refer specifically to illusions which today as much as ever are particularly influential, illusions of the kind which without our being in the least aware of it may colour and modify the whole of our outlook, fundamental ideas and behaviour, with the result that we become unreal human beings, maladapted to the real world we live in, absurdly confident of our sanity, common sense and grip on things, all the while being objectively no more than inefficient bunglers, wasters, and self-deceivers.

Those who are familiar with Kierkegaard’s life and thought will recall that his real career as a serious philosopher with a great vocation did not begin until he had gone through the experience of what he called ‘the great earthquake’. Now there is no doubt that this terrible and profoundly effective experience which forced upon him certain essential realizations about himself which it may be he could not have reached by any less drastic way, was a crisis precipitated by the death of his father. Thus, it may be said, then, that Existential Philosophy as we know it today had its origin in the death of the philosopher’s father. There is a deep connexion between this fact and the truth expressed by Chestov in another passage from the work I quoted from just now in which he says:

'As soon as man feels that God is not, he suddenly comprehends the frightful horror and the wild folly of human temporal existence, and when he has comprehended this he awakes, perhaps not to the ultimate knowledge, but to the penultimate. Was it not so with Nietzsche, Spinoza, Pascal, Luther, Augustine, even with St. Paul?'

There cannot be for the Christian any reality in Christ's resurrection unless he really believes in it. Not very long after Kierkegaard's campaign against the high-toned insincerity of the Churches representing the social acknowledgement of God's reality in the clever, busy, highly respectable bourgeois world of the mid-nineteenth century, Nietzsche proclaimed to European thinking men, who had succeeded in banishing all real religious consciousness from everyday life completely, 'God is dead!'

When he has comprehended this, man awakes, perhaps not to the penultimate knowledge, but to the prepenultimate. I believe that the ultimate, or penultimate knowledge will be found to be the beginning of all really transparent apprehension of the world which scientific knowledge decomposes. This is because I have the faith of a Christian and really believe in the truth and presently imminent reality of the Resurrection, so far as I understand it.

'The ancients, to awaken from life, turned to death. The moderns flee from death in order not to awake and take pains not even to think of it. Which are the more 'practical'? Those who compare earthly life to sleep and wait for the miracle of the awakening, or those who see in death a sleep without dreamfaces, the perfect sleep, and while away their time with "reasonable" and "natural" explanations? This is the basic question of philosophy, and he who evades it evades philosophy itself.'

### III

It might be said that philosophy as Chestov envisaged it was, instead of being as it is supposed to be, a part of one's education, a subject studied in a course having its place in the curriculum of a university, a necessary *antidote* to one's education. Philosophy in this sense—truly Existential Philosophy, which aims, not at making as complete and rational a discursive exposition as possible of the purely conceptional problems of existence, but at launching individuals into a more fully conscious and authentic real existence

of their own, is really the beginning and foundation of a second education, one that continues throughout the lives of all of whom it might ultimately be said that they attained anything like wisdom. To begin with, it brings one to the realization that the knowledge of the world, of man, of history, of reality, with which one has been equipped by one's education, the picture one has of the reality which is the contingent context of one's life, is only a structure of more or less ready-made and on the whole passively accepted *ideas*, corresponding to the objective real world with a degree of accuracy that no one could ever hope to calculate.

The most outstanding characteristics of Chestov's philosophy are its anti-idealism and its anti-rationalism. Now both these expressions require immediate modificatory definition. Chestov was not a disbeliever in the invisible, nor anti-metaphysical in the sense in which the Logical Positivists are anti-metaphysical. Philosophy can never dispense with ideas or with the use of the rational faculty. But a self-critical philosophy can become conscious that the individual thinker's ideas are necessarily only approximate and partial reflections not to be confused with what they reflect, and that the Reason with the deificatory capital R is only a collective reflection of the individual's faculty of thinking rationally re-reflected in the minds of individuals.

Idealism in the sense in which Chestov's philosophy understands the word is thinking which treats ideas as though they were the completed final end-product of thinking, whereas they can for the existing individual never be more than the means by which he thinks, convenient approximate reflections from which the thinker should continually re-detach himself and what they reflect.

To some extent, everyone is an idealist, in the sense of the word which I have been attempting to define. Undoubtedly everyone has an idea of the world we live in which is only a very approximate, and to a large extent second-hand, hearsay idea of it, and just as undoubtedly we rely on this idea that we have cultivated and allowed to grow up in our minds and come to accept it just as though it really corresponded to the actual world in its unknowable objectivity. And unless we are continually conscious of the difference between knowing a thing and thinking one knows it before having had an opportunity to do so, we are thus in danger of becoming secured against reality, which *in reality* is inevitably mysterious, being only very incompletely knowable

through any one individual's experience, unaccountable in fact and perhaps still full of astonishing surprises and things of which we had never dreamed. It is only too easy to become comfortably secured against reality in this way, secured against it by an ideal reality which a kind of universal tacit agreement among us allows us to regard as identical with the only true reality, though the reason we tolerate it as a substitute is that it is what we call normal, average, safe, readily accountable, domesticated in fact to fit in with our own ordinarily egotistical purposes.

Only with a full realization of the extent to which we are all idealists of this kind, only, that is to say, with a proper realization of our actual state of Socratic ignorance, for which there can be no *a priori* truths until we have found out what they are for ourselves, can the autocritical habit of mind indispensable to a genuine philosopher begin to develop.

Anti-idealism is the result of a realization of how fatally easy it can always be to confuse an idea of a thing that one has in one's mind that came to be there as the result of our having read or been told something about someone or something, with an idea that we might have developed of the same thing if we had actually experienced knowledge of it ourselves. We remain very largely ignorant of the extent to which our knowledge is in reality knowledge of the knowledge of others. Education fosters this sort of confusion and ignorance, unless a conscious anti-idealism enables us to be continually on our guard against it. We cannot possibly do without the knowledge of others, but it is most useful to us when we are fully conscious that it is not the result of our own experience when we remember it. As soon as we become aware of the extent to which we are conditioned by and dependent on ideas, we become perceptibly more realistic and objective; at the same time we become more open-minded, tolerant, pacific and co-operative. We cease to think of ourselves as the elect, to whom the last word on our special subjects has been specially divulged by grace of the goddess of Reason; for an orderly but after a while dusty permanent model scheme of basic assumptions for referring to about Everything, we exchange a new habit, that of having a thorough spring-clean and stocktaking of all our ideas regularly at not-too-long intervals.

It may be that Chestov himself nowhere expresses what I have called his anti-idealism in quite the bald form in which I have

presented it; it may be, too, that what I have said either reveals the quintessence of Chestov, or is, to the contrary, a misrepresentation of him resulting from my having used Chestov's name merely as a cover under which to pass off some idea or attitude of my own. If the latter were actually the case, I might still argue with a grain of truth that in this I had at least given an illustration of Chestov's method. At any rate, Chestov did himself express quite clearly enough the anti-idealism I have spoken of, in the following words:

'Even the blind, one would think, must arrive at the conviction that matter and materialism are not the crucial issue. The most deadly enemy of the spirit everywhere is not inert matter, which in fact, as the ancients taught, and as men teach today, exists either not at all, or only potentially as something illusory, pitiable, powerless, suppliant to all—the most deadly and pitiless enemies are ideas. Ideas, and ideas alone, are that with which every man must do battle who would overcome the falsehood of the world.'

I think I may add here, that he who would overcome the false materialist philosophy which has so often been denounced as the real reason for the present situation in our relations with Leon Chestov's native land, the philosophy of the Communist intellectuals leading the great Party which claims to represent the toiling Russian masses, the philosophy which drove Chestov into exile after 1920, will be unable to get very far until he sees that Materialist Idealism, which does not yet realize that it ought truly to be thus so-called, confuses reflection and reflector. Certainly, there cannot be a reflection without a reflector for it to be seen in, but it is a naïve and fatal error to confuse the two on account of their being inseparable in living experience, although easily separable in reflected or theoretical experience by the (immaterial) experimenter.

It might also be added that Christian philosophy properly so-called is anti-idealist in just the sense I have been discussing, or otherwise can be only a quasi-Christian philosophy, as most philosophies since Christ, with the possible exception of such philosophy as might in a certain sense be called Socratic, have inevitably been. 'The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath' is the classic maxim which might serve as the type for an authentically Christian anti-idealism.

For a Christian existential philosopher, all we highly rational,



educated men are in reality all we still to a very large extent ignorant and unconscious men, just as all we respectable citizens are in reality all we miserable sinners.

‘For we must disrobe ourselves of all false colours, and unclothe our Souls of evil Habits,’ says Thomas Traherne, in the *Centuries of Meditations*; ‘All our Thoughts must be Infantlike and clear; the Powers of our Soul free from the Leaven of this World, and disentangled from men’s conceits and customs. Grit in the eye or yellow jaundice will not let a Man see those Objects truly that are before it. And therefore it is requisite that we should be as very Strangers to the Thoughts, Customs and Opinions of men in this World, as if we were but little children.’

And Kierkegaard tells us very much the same thing, in an entry in his *Journals*:

‘*Truth is naked.* In order to swim one takes off one’s clothes—in order to aspire to the truth one must undress in a far more inward sense, divest oneself of all one’s inward clothes, of thoughts, conceptions, selfishness, etc., before one is sufficiently naked.’

This attitude of continual auto-criticism, which I have characterized as Anti-Idealism, is recognizably the same as that which Chestov expresses in the following passage from his *All Things Are Possible*:

‘There is no mistake about it, nobody *wants* to think. I do not speak here of logical thinking. That, like any other natural function, gives man great pleasure. For this reason philosophical systems however complicated, arouse real and permanent interest in the public provided they only require from man the logical exercise of the mind, and nothing else. But to think—really to think—surely this means a relinquishing of logic. It means living a new life. It means a permanent sacrifice of the dearest habits, tastes, attachments, without even the assurance that the sacrifice will bring any compensation.’

#### IV

What superficial commentators have unanimously described as ‘anti-rationalism’ and even ‘irrationalism’ in Chestov, is really nothing of the sort, but a necessary implication of his anti-idealism and a result of his unusual objectivity of mind, or what amounts to the same thing, of his highly auto-critical habit of thought (prior to the actual approximate formulation of his

thought in writing, that is to say). A thinker who is above all aware of his own ignorance and uncertainty, who is not deceived by his ability to discover and repeat impressively sounding formulae into supposing that he has solved a problem and said the last word on a subject, who is constantly asking questions, and questioning where it is the rule to see nothing questionable, will not be satisfied for long with the criteria which simple-minded rationalists regard as the sole supreme arbiters of their thought. This does not mean that he must therefore despise Reason or logic; it simply indicates that he is not limited by the common confusion between what man has discovered, and what he has invented for purposes of convenience, in his mind.

No. 267 of Pascal's *Pensées* may relevantly be quoted here:

'The last proceeding of reason is to recognize that there is an infinity of things which are beyond it. It is but feeble if it does not see so far as to know this. But if natural things are beyond it, what will be said of supernatural?'

Also No. 272:

'There is nothing so conformable to reason as this disavowal of reason.'

The individual human reason becomes more rational as a result of losing its idealist awe of the Cartesian Goddess of Reason, who is never satisfied until everything has been reduced to clarity and distinctness, even if by artificial means; in recognizing its inevitable limitations and in liberating itself from the delusory self-sufficiency of the Cartesian cogitator, reason transcends itself and can become reintegrated with the creative imagination.

In a previous quotation, Chestov asks whether real thinking does not mean a relinquishing of logic. That he means by this an emancipation from complete dependence on logic is obvious from the following passage from the same book (*All Things Are Possible*):

'To discard logic as an instrument, a means or aid for acquiring knowledge, would be extravagant. Why should we? For the sake of consequentialism? i.e. for logic's very self? But logic, as an aim in itself, or even as the *only* means to knowledge, is a different matter. Against this one must fight even if he has against him all the authorities of thought—beginning with Aristotle.'

Existential Philosophy cannot be understood unless it is seen to be a protest and a struggle, fighting against not only Aristotle, but also against, for instance, Descartes, Spinoza, Hegel, Spencer,

Husserl and Carnap. Its objectively critical attitude to the notion of Pure Reason and its refusal to make itself dependent on any pre-determined method or criteria is related to its preoccupation with the problem of Original Sin and the hypothesis that the present condition of man is a fallen and not a supernatural one. Since man began to become civilized, his condition has been necessarily an unnatural one. Reason, the use of which has led to the progressive development of human civilization, is nevertheless not an entirely unmixed blessing. It is the blessing promised to Eve by the serpent and comes from the tree of which the fruit is death and limitation, not life and freedom. Existential Philosophy is a struggle for liberation. With it, an essentially Christian philosophy, as distinct from a nominally and superficially Christian philosophy, enters the history of Western thought. This is true even of Nietzsche, if not of the whole of Nietzsche (in whom the 'will to stupidity' and the 'will to power' not infrequently come into stultifying conflict), at least of that part of his thought which still remains creatively valuable; for Christianity had become by Nietzsche's time so profoundly self-contradictory on account of the predominance of pagan ethical principles in European thought surviving even Luther and the Reformation (the Renaissance and the secularization of classical learning putting back with one hand what the Lutheran Reformation had taken away with the other) that the genuinely Christian liberation in thought had to assume the guise of Anti-Christ. It is Nietzsche's greatest fault and weakness that he failed to understand this situation and his relation to it anything like as fully as he might have done.

Chestov is of all the great existential philosophers—the others are Pascal, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche—the one who is nearest to us; and he is of all recent philosophers the one who is most necessary to a true understanding of the significance of existential philosophy in general and of its role in the crisis of modern thought. He is the philosopher of Tragedy and of Paradox; a seeker after the 'one thing needful', a solitary thinker whose despair does not counsel us to come to terms with defeatist resignation, but can inspire in those capable of it the violence with which alone is the Kingdom of Heaven to be taken. His message is just that which is needed as a corrective to the dispassionately impotent, science-seduced teaching of present-day British Academic philosophy. 'The don is the eunuch,' as Kierkegaard

wrote in his *Journals*, 'but he has not emasculated himself for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven, but on the contrary, in order to fit better into this characterless world.' Chestov never made the slightest attempt to fit in with the characterless modern world; perhaps that is why he has been so largely ignored by the intellectual representatives of this world till now; but it is also the reason why one can be confident that he will eventually be heard, nevertheless, for such thinking as his is for modern philosophy increasingly 'the one thing needful'.

'Power without wisdom is dangerous,' Bertrand Russell went so far as to admit in a broadcast talk not long ago, 'and what our age needs is wisdom, even more than knowledge. Given wisdom, the power conferred by science can bring a new degree of well-being to all mankind; without wisdom, it can only bring destruction.' This would appear to indicate a belated readiness on the part of an authoritative representative of scientifically aspiring materialist Thought to turn at last to the consideration of what Unamuno has called 'the most tragic problem of philosophy', or at least to concede that scientific thought and wisdom are two quite different things, since they became separated by the University dictatorship of the professoriat, which exiles human subjectivity and silences the private feelings of the individual's heart. The utterances of Bertrand Russell in view of the crisis of contemporary society should be compared with the answer of the old professor to the young student whose personal crisis drives her to seek his wise advice in Chekhov's *A Dreary Story*.

Supposing the philosophers who speak in the name of scientific materialism do gradually become aware of their lack of wisdom, and begin to try to become philosophers in the true sense of the word (the etymological definition is 'one who loves wisdom'), where are they to turn? Existential Philosophy does not give itself out to be wisdom; though it looks rather as though Sartre, for instance, would have no objection to the public making use of his philosophy as though it were. Existential philosophers may be said to be in general agreement, however, with Pascal's saying: 'I can only approve of those who seek with lamentation'. Should anyone turn to Chestov for wisdom, this is what he has to say to him:

'Although there have been on earth many wise men who knew much that is infinitely more valuable than all the treasures for which

men are ready even to sacrifice their lives, still wisdom is to us a book with seven seals, a hidden hoard upon which we cannot lay our hands. Many—the vast majority—are even seriously convinced that philosophy is a most tedious and painful occupation to which are doomed some miserable wretches who enjoy the odious privilege of being called philosophers. I believe that even professors of philosophy, the more clever of them, not seldom share this opinion and suppose that therein lies the secret of their science, revealed to the initiate alone. Fortunately, the position is otherwise. It may be that mankind is destined never to change in this respect, and a thousand years hence men will care much more about “deductions” theoretical and practical, from the truth than about truth itself; but real philosophers, men who know what they want and at what they aim, will hardly be embarrassed by this. They will utter their truths as before, without in the least considering what conclusions will be drawn from them by the lovers of logic.’

In case the end of this passage should seem to lend itself to any ambiguity, I think I may add that it is unlikely that Chestov, in speaking of ‘real philosophers’, was thinking of the representatives of bourgeois materialism, thinkers who also certainly ‘know what they want and at what they aim’, i.e., knowledge, i.e., power.

P. D. PARTNER

## STUDIES IN GENIUS

### IX—LEONARDO DA VINCI

MEN felt, both in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and afterwards, that European man was at that time crossing the frontier, that he had as it were changed his name. The name given to this was ‘Renaissance’, and in the nineteenth century Burckhardt distilled the essence of what had happened in his wonderful essay—which is in itself a justification for the German school of history. ‘The discovery of the world and the discovery of man.’ Here one feels on safe ground, from here we moderns look tolerantly and distantly across the gulf which lies between us and the angelology of St. Thomas Aquinas or the enchanted forests of the *San Graal*.

But the cold winds of historical criticism have blown very hard in the ninety odd years which have passed since Burckhardt was lecturing at Basle, and the nymph who walked in Italy, whom he saw so clearly for a second, has now been lost again in the mists. My academic friends with their great apparatus of *Wissenschaftslehre* are beginning to sap my confidence in Renaissance man. Philosophy? but surely the true Renaissance of speculative thought was in the twelfth century. Scepticism? but Nicholas of Autrecourt had said as much as Hume before the battle of Poitiers was fought. Art? but the naturalistic technique is contained in the medieval manuscript. The discovery of the world? but the medieval cosmos persisted in men's minds until the seventeenth century—while, paradoxically, the speculative physics which in the end broke up that cosmos were the work of the University of Paris in the fourteenth century. In face of this revelation of flux and uncertainty one begins to suspect that the Renaissance is a nineteenth-century myth. If this was indeed the birth of humanism, then the central point to which we turn must be Renaissance man. And here we are rewarded by something which is no myth—the universal man. Leonardo da Vinci: painter, sculptor, architect, inventor, mathematician, musician, physicist, astronomer. Here the ascent of the ladder which links man to heaven has been abandoned, here are only the links which bind him to the universe. Leonardo stands on the boundary between medieval and modern man, his frightening conclusion is *Facile cosa e farsi universale*. An easy thing, to make oneself universal. The serpent's promise seems fulfilled—'your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods'.

It is extraordinary that this universal genius should be so alien and distant from the ordinary ways of modern man. Shakespeare speaks to every man in his own tongue, but Leonardo's painting seems to speak some strange language of its own, which can only be suggested (as Pater suggested it) by a sort of magical incantation. The nymph in the Windsor drawing stands behind a shifting screen of water and points to something concealed behind her; the place is by its essence remote, and closer knowledge of the drawing only intensifies one's awareness of secrecy. If Shakespeare is ever in this mood, it is in *The Tempest*, but Shakespeare can always move when he wishes in a world of flesh and blood; in Leonardo there is always a distortion, and if he draws an equivalent to

Falstaff, the result is a grotesque. He loved to draw monsters and to make them in his workshop with the parts of lizards and small animals; if Leonardo is Prospero, then nothing delights him more than Caliban. There is paradox in this, for this sorcerer was the apostle of scientific 'naturalist' art, and a great natural scientist, a sceptic who mocked the high-flying Florentine Platonists as much as the astrologers. He was the dogmatist of experimental method, and, if you believed his theory of art, you would expect him to be a prodigy of matter-of-factness. He was practical beyond belief, endless in devices for controlling rivers, improving stage machinery and so on, and yet the mechanic is a lover of mystery, his personality is inaccessible. The surface of Leonardo is too modern, while the current which flows beneath comes from more obscure sources than Burckhardt would suggest. He led us to believe that the discovery of the world and the discovery of man went hand in hand—that the growth of humanism and the growth of natural science were one process. But research since Burckhardt seems to show that there were few real advances in natural science and cosmography between the early fourteenth century and Galileo in the late sixteenth century. The literary revival of the Italian humanists, the discovery and editing of the classical texts, reached its peak in the mid-fifteenth century, and the Florentine school of naturalistic art—Donatello, Uccello, Masaccio and so on—grew at the same pace as this rediscovery of Greek and Roman humanism. But speculative physics, which is the basis of modern natural science, had already made its first developments in the schools of Oxford and Paris in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The first modern theory of perspective was that of an Archbishop of Canterbury who died in 1292. Roger Bacon was no modern thinker isolated among medieval obscurantists; his attack on the Aristotelian physics was developed by no less a person than Buridan, that Rector of the University of Paris whom Villon thought was one of the many unwilling lovers of Margaret of Burgundy—

. . . la royne  
 Qui commanda que Buridan  
 fust jetté en ung sac en Seine . . .

The result of the Aristotelian physics, which followed at the heel of the Aristotelian metaphysic, had been that queer, static cosmography at which we tend to laugh when we first read Chaucer or



Dante—the tidy, concentric rings of the crystalline spheres, which are propelled round a comfortably stationary earth by a first mover without which the whole affair would stop. In this freakish cosmos, a stone which one has thrown moves only because the air closes behind it to push it. Buridan and the school of Paris first suggested the theory of *impetus*—that a body, once moved, will go on until friction or some other opposing force causes it to stop. The effect of the theory is to make the first mover unnecessary and so to break down the static and enclosed universe: if the fall of a stone to the ground is not caused by the exhaustion of the thrust of the air, then some other force must draw it down—perhaps the attraction of a larger body for a smaller. And why should not a heavenly body attract a smaller heavenly body—why, in fact, should there not be a plurality of worlds? This is the end of Dante's cosmology; no longer can we talk of

*l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle.*

It is this, and not the Copernician doctrine of a stellar centred universe, which is fatal to medieval belief, and thus it is not to what we would call the Renaissance, but to the world of the Parisian schoolmen, that Leonardo da Vinci in part belongs. In the formal sense of a knowledge of the Greek and Roman world, he was a barbarian and no humanist—*uomo senza lettere*. But while he was part scientist he was also part artist, and as an artist he could not but partake of the deep and adventurous humanism of the Italian painters. To pursue the human as an end in itself, and to use the antique as a guide in this exploration; this is implicit in Mantegna and even in Verocchio, Leonardo's master. So the science of man and the science of nature, those two points of view which have ever since lived together so uneasily in the modern world, have their first real meeting place in Leonardo da Vinci. The physicists whom he read had been for the most part schoolmen and clerics, men devoted to the arid intricacies of the *quaestio* and the *disputatio*, and the new school of humanists, the men of 'good letters' who inspired the painters, had despised them as the scholastic 'barbarians'. In Leonardo, however uneasily the two are accommodated, the human point of view is introduced to the natural point of view. Thus he has a better title to be called the first modern man than Leon Battista Alberti, who was so learned and so full of *virtù*, so clever at turning back-somersaults and at throwing pennies to the tops of cathedrals. Leonardo then was

almost the first to look at the world through our new modern eyes, and what he saw there cannot but be of the topmost import: perhaps he also said:

O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here!

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,

That has such people in't!

But his response was not one of simple wonder, for so far as we can gather it was ambiguous, *nuancé*, enigmatic and even sinister. Nineteenth-century writers made a great to-do in finding the *joie de vivre*, the humanity, the conviviality of the great Renaissance figures, but the reality of Leonardo is something very alien and disquieting. Although he had great charm and was the *arbiter elegantiarum* in Milan, he was not a convivial figure; rather his note-books reveal him as repelled by mankind, as seeing politics as war, bloodshed and betrayal, and as moved by a kind of tragic pacifism. In the 'Prophecies' he says *of metals*:

There shall come forth out of dark and obscure caves that which will put the whole human race in great anxiety, peril and death. To many that seek it, after many sorrows it will give delight, and to those that are not in its company, death with want and misfortune. . . . This will deprive free cities of their happy condition; this will take away the lives of many; this will make men torment one another with many artifices, deceptions and treasons. O monstrous creature! How much better would it be for men that everything should return to Hell.

Pessimism and frustration never leave Leonardo; he was never interested in his individual fellow men, and he tried to escape into speculative mathematics from the melancholia which in his last days engulfed him. His pacifism had no fruit in action; for Ludovico Sforza he designed war weapons and part of the great castle at Milan, for Cesare Borgia he helped to plan the subjugation of central Italy in 1501. Both were tyrants: tyranny he despised but he still offered no resistance because he had none of that active affection for other men which is the basis of moral action. With one or two men he was in love after a fashion, but the force which drove him to be universal drove him also to be alone.

To the end that well-being of the body may not injure the mind the painter or draughtsman must always remain solitary

... While you are alone you are entirely your own, and if you have one companion you are half your own, and the less so in proportion to the indiscretion of his behaviour.

Bodies may jostle together, but if the mind is to understand all things then it must rest utterly detached from them, moved by neither affection nor passion. The vilest of human faces, or men laughing, or men strangled by hanging, are all drawn in the mental climate of the operating theatre. He drew a plough with the device *hostinato rigor*, obstinate rigour, for the scientific detachment, analysis, objectivity which is for Leonardo the condition of all true experience in science and art (for he did not distinguish between the two). Included is the onus of mathematical proof:

No human investigation can call itself true science unless it will stand mathematical demonstration, and if you say that those sciences which begin and end in the mind can attain truth ... I will deny it ... for in such mental operations there is no experience, without which there is no certainty.

Experience, then, is formal, experimental, mathematical. But this presents an appalling critical problem, for how did this mathematical iceberg of a man paint and draw with exquisite sensibility, with mystery and spiritual force? So far as the problem can be reduced to terms of sources and influence, its answer is in the work of a German philosopher who reconciled the new experimental science with the world of spirit. Nicholas of Cusa was a cardinal, a neo-Platonist who in the fifteenth century accepted the empirical outlook of the Parisian schoolmen, and adopted their intuition that mathematical structure is the key to natural science. But he gave to the theory of numbers the same Pythagorean treatment that Plato had used, associating the perfect numbers with the perfect ideas, in a metaphysical hierarchy topped by the Christian Trinity. This schema of the world of things, of numbers, and of pure spirit is known not by deductive logic, but in 'learned ignorance'; to know we must discard all the impedimenta of authority, doctrine and previous experience, and enter naked into the house of truth, as the Idiot. Humility and abnegation are made a condition of knowledge, all intellectual authority is rejected, and empirical method is reconciled with religious mysticism. His doctrine recalls Bergson; all sense experience is flux, and only in God is there synthesis and stillness; it is a subtle

and frightening development of the mystery of time and of the inaccessibility of the 'now'.

This *nunc* which is time's point of departure is the essence or the being of time; we name it 'today' or 'eternity', where *nunc* remains in perpetual immobility. And the *nunc* of eternity is eternity itself, is God himself.

The knowledge of the idiot is therefore the real *scientia*; the standing away from all created things in order to understand them is a scientific poverty and humility. And Leonardo in his intellectual loneliness, with his 'obstinate rigour', is repeating the doctrine of Nicholas of Cusa. For Leonardo, knowledge is not natural, but spiritual—'the senses are of the earth, but reason stands apart in contemplation'. 'Our body has its place beneath the sky, and the sky has its place beneath the spirit.' Mathematics is a shorthand of the divine reasons, simple sense experience is flux, and only through mathematics can man commune with the spiritual and the eternal in things. But art also is a similitude of the divine mind, and is in essence mathematical, so that the distinction between scientific knowledge and artistic creation fades away: the effort of the artist to know the rational structure of things is itself the act of creation. Finally, and furthest away from the cold blood-stream of the empiricists, perfect knowledge is man's aim, and love will follow knowledge, which is itself the union of the lover and the beloved:

The lover is moved by the beloved as the senses are by sensible objects; and they unite, and become one and the same thing. The work is the first thing born of this union; if the thing loved is base the lover becomes base.

When the thing taken into union is perfectly adapted to that which receives it, the result is delight and pleasure and satisfaction.

When that which loves is united to the thing beloved it can rest there; when the burden is laid down it finds rest there.

Thus in a neo-Platonic theory of knowledge, the claims of the scientist and the artist are conciliated. But while the Cusan theory is one of balance and synthesis, the work of Leonardo suggests tension, bitterness and deliberate mystery. The sexuality of Leonardo is twisted, and seems to correspond to no Greek or Christian type. In the innumerable sketches in the note-books there

are not more than half a dozen drawings of women which were not made either for a specific composition, or for the study of anatomy. It seems that he was the lover of a youth named Giacomo Andrea, or Salai; 'a thief, a liar and a glutton', the artist's note-books call him, but his handsome but coarse portrait nevertheless recurs in them until Leonardo's death. Opposite the beautiful youth is drawn a middle-aged man with aggressive features, and an air of both command and contemplation—both sage and warrior. In the Uffizi picture of the Adoration of the Kings, such a powerful face which incarnates noble contemplation, faces a beautifully poised youth across the body of the infant Christ. Here, one feels, is balance, here Socrates and Alcibiades face one another in noble communion. But in the note-books the same types are shown in various stages of degradation; the sage is turned into a grotesque cartoon of Caesar, with the projections of nose and eyebrows over-emphasized, and the jaw deformed and repulsive, while the Salai type becomes coarser and less pleasant. The portraits are complementary, and they correspond to one of the deepest patterns of Leonardo's mind, for on page after page of the Windsor manuscripts the Caesar or Socrates profile reappears, sometimes in a single rapid stroke of the pen, sometimes as a careful sketch, drawn sometimes with detachment, sometimes in ferocious caricature. The youth not quite so frequently, but quite often facing the warrior across one of those pages spattered with mathematical sums, scientific sketches, anatomical details. And here is the visible image of the split in Leonardo, in the modern man, between *hostinato rigor*, obstinate, logical, scientific rigour, and the divine eros, the creative love.

Yet there is a third image in Leonardo, the most troubling of all, which falls outside this Platonic pattern. There is a queer, beautiful androgynous creature, certainly not Salai, and yet not wholly feminine—the angel in the Louvre version of the Madonna of the Rocks, or, most typical and beautiful, the sketch for St. John Baptist at Windsor. The sage in Leonardo, the bad-tempered and boorish mathematician, would try to expel the feminine, to subordinate art to a series of formulae and to make the image of the loved one a male image. But the Platonists forget that man himself is bi-sexual, and that there is a feminine at the centre of male personality. *Anima*, although a shy and fugitive creature, is hard to expel; if pushed out of the personality in one form she

will reappear in another. Freud, in his brilliant interpretation of Leonardo's dream, was puzzled by the passive type of sexuality which is shown there, and which seemed incompatible with the warrior and with the lover of Salai. These still and beautiful angels reveal a feminine passivity in the depths of Leonardo himself: besides the mathematician who shows himself in the warrior, there is the artist who shows himself in the angel. One need not fall into the old error of personifying the parts of the soul, for the artist and mathematician melt into one another in the same personality: there is a sketch where all three of the types I have just described are drawn in a single group, with each face built up round exactly the same physical characteristics. Thus the difference between the sexes is shown as a mere matter of degree.

Freud showed that the pattern of Leonardo's homosexuality began in an early eroticism directed towards his mother; this was repulsed, and henceforth all desire for a woman met the shock of the repulse given by the mother, and became desire for man. But erotic love for the mother means dislike for the father, and here the pattern of sexuality affects the pattern of religion. There is an easy transition from *Pater meus* to *Pater noster*: the idea of the all-powerful God is linked with the power of the father, and the rejection of the father may mean the rejection of God. Nor was this the only path along which Leonardo was being pushed into atheism; for his geological and biological knowledge was leading towards doubts of a type which did not become widespread in Europe until the nineteenth century. He found that the prehistoric flood in North Italy did not reach to the tops of the mountains, yet it is written 'the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth, and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered'. Could Genesis be mistaken? Again, instead of representing man as a being 'a little lower than the angels', Leonardo is far along the track of man the animal. 'The description of man, which includes that of such creatures as are of almost the same species, as apes, monkeys and the like, which are many.' As an unbelieving scientist Leonardo wanted to treat man as if he were on the dissecting table, as an artist and a Platonist he felt man to be a spiritual subject. One result of this tension is the anatomical studies of human skulls—exquisitely sensitive, but also made unpleasant and sinister by the disparity between cold scientific analysis and the intense awareness of human death. Vasari speaks of an atheism which he

abandoned before his death, and the 'Last Supper' at Milan certainly suggests at least a very unorthodox belief. The picture is the culmination of a long-standing tendency in *Quattrocento* painting to denude religious objects of their quality of symbol, and so to rob them of the religious mystery, and to leave them only with the aesthetic mystery. A man might pray *through* the fourteenth-century altar-pieces of Siena, where the painted Christ is intended only as a stage on the way towards the real Christ—to use the Augustinian phrase, as one stage in the ascent of the mind towards God. But the 'Last Supper' lacks both the mysterious humility of the Gothic Christ and the majesty of the 'Christus Pantocrator' at Ravenna, because it is a portrayal not of a present real God, but of a past historical event. A dramatic event, and one full of the most tremendous consequences, certainly, but nevertheless a past event, contained within the picture and not existing outside it.

But if Leonardo denied God, he did not deify man, although this is what the nineteenth-century humanists loved to suggest. As he grew older, his pessimism increased; he turned more and more to the indifferent world of mathematics as his faith in man grew weaker. He hated war, he hated the eating of flesh, and he grew to see man as one of the carnivorous animals. Man delights him not—'king of the animals, as thou hast described him . . . I should rather say, king of the beasts.' Seeing man through the eyes of biology, Leonardo sees him as lost in nature, the child not of God the father but of nature the mother. And here begins his mythology, his *ersatz* for God. Nature is his goddess and his law—'O divine necessity of nature' . . . As the schoolmen had seen God as rational, as intelligible light, so Leonardo conceives nature as rational: 'Nature is full of infinite reasons, which never occurred in experience'. 'Nature begins in its reasons and ends in experience, and we need to do the contrary, that is to begin in experience, and in this to investigate the causes.' But the idea of nature which faced Leonardo was very different from that which had faced his scholastic precursors of the fourteenth century. They had imagined a tidy and static cosmos, but the Cusan had taught him to think of an infinite physical universe, so that instead of the tangible spheres of Dante's Paradise, he was among those infinite spaces which were to torment Pascal. Thus he thought of nature with desire, but also with fear: 'fear because of its dark and obscure reaches, desire to see what lies among such miraculous things'. His desire trapped



him; it was the typical desire of the Platonic homosexual to understand completely, to transcend the contingent and to see the absolute, but this way is one of frustration and melancholia, as he himself admits. 'These reasons are able to help you distinguish between the true and the false, which knowledge makes men promise themselves the knowledge of all possible things. . . . and do not fall into ignorance, which will drive you to despair and give you melancholia.' It is a tragic situation, because the more knowledge you have, the more perfectly you will understand your ignorance. 'The peak of happiness will be the supreme cause of unhappiness, and the perfection of knowledge the cause of stupidity.'

This mystique of nature is the deviation which takes Leonardo out of the artistic world of the sixteenth century and makes him into something which Sir Kenneth Clark has called 'romantic'. In spite of the severe theoretical naturalism of the 'Treatise on Painting' Leonardo makes notes on the use of light and shade to produce effects of the bizarre and unusual, in a way which recalls Rembrandt and even Delacroix. The painter, for example, is to stand outside a cottage door and paint the interior as revealed by a single shaft of sun. Five or six years before his death a change began to take place in his style. He had always been interested in formations of falling water, in which the supernormal speed at which his eyes worked enabled him to record the symmetrical patterns of the movement. The natural geometry of the curves in the water fascinated him, and began to edge out the formal visual planes which before had been the basis of his art. He felt the organic process of nature in growth, and the flowers in the Louvre version of the 'Madonna of the Rocks', the Star of Bethlehem plant at Windsor, are not static visual impressions, but living plants which seem to retain their potentiality for growth. He studied the anatomy of reproduction, and the idea of nature as fertility began to control a part of his mind—he worshipped Venus Urania instead of Venus Pandemos. In the mathematically formed curves of the falling water he felt that he had found the connexion between the reality of nature in growth and his own mathematical theories of art. All these threads are drawn together in 'Leda and the Swan'. There is no hint of classical myth in the Leda drawings, the Leda who charmed Zeus was no more than a beautiful woman, but Leonardo's Leda personifies not love but

fertility, not the beloved, but the mother. The drawings for the head show the hair as something closely akin to the formations of falling water: there is little of the directly erotic in the body, which is a mathematical study in circular tension. Her sexuality is impersonal; she is no human, but Cybele in her Phrygian groves. Beside her, four children are breaking out of the eggs; the grass and flora round them are luxuriant, with twinings and inter-twinings which suggest the jungle. The Leda may well be the great mother-goddess; certainly she is a religious symbol in a way in which the Christ of the 'Last Supper' is not.

In the same period Leonardo painted a picture, now lost, not of the Annunciation as traditionally painted, but of the angel of the Annunciation as Mary saw him. The Leningrad copy suggests that the angel was a daemon rather than a Christian symbol, and he is perhaps some other strange hypostasis of natural forces. The so-called St. John Baptist in the Louvre is another of these queer creatures; the cross which he holds seems quite irrelevant, and he looks back over his shoulder like the more pleasant nymph at Windsor and beckons, though one hesitates to think what mysteries lie in the darkness of the background.

The climax of the mysterious, the bizarre, the daemonic in Leonardo is in the writings and drawings of the Deluge. As prose, the instructions for drawing a flood might certainly be called 'romantic'.

Let the dark and gloomy air be seen buffeted by the rush of contrary winds and dense from the continual rain mingled with hail and bearing hither and thither an infinite number of branches torn from trees and mixed with numberless leaves. All round may be seen venerable trees, uprooted and stripped by the fury of the winds, and the fragments of mountains, already scoured bare by the torrents, falling into those torrents and choking their valleys till the swollen rivers overflow and submerge the wide lands and their inhabitants. . . . Ah! what dreadful noises were heard in the dark air riven by the thunder of fury and lightnings it flashed forth, which darted from the clouds dealing ruin, and striking all that opposed its course. Ah! how many you might have seen closing their ears to shut out the tremendous sound made in the darkening air by the raging of the winds mingled with the rain, the thunders of the heaven and the fury of the thunderbolts. Others were not

content with shutting their eyes, but laid their heads one upon the other to cover them the closer that they might not see the cruel slaughter of the human race by the wrath of God. Ah! how many laments and how many in their terror flung themselves from the rocks. . . .

There are some early drawings which go no further than the tradition of the Apocalyptic writings in the years before the Reformation: fire from heaven strikes a town and a group of men, while among the group running from the flames stands a single huge upright figure, who may be the prophet Ezekiel. But the later drawings, which date from his old age, are not of judgement but of mere destruction. Great eruptions of the earth are suggested, and a mountain, overturned by a column of water, falls on a town and crushes it. Trees and vegetation are drawn in arched groups with all Leonardo's sympathies for curved structure, but they are twisted and torn by the storm. There is the last stage of the Deluge, where nothing is left but the waterspouts. The most strongly and strangely stylized of them all shows the explosion of a hill. Here the device of geometrically formed curves is used with terrible effect to suggest the uprooted blocks of rock which are flung out in a circle. It is the vision of dissolution, of life torn into fragments.

Leonardo, like all the world since the fall, was obsessed by the problem of knowledge, and he found that the torment of the problem lay in the rift between abstract knowledge and the immediate experience of the artist. If Paul Valéry were right and Leonardo's power as an artist lay in his gift of intellectual abstraction, then there would be no Leonardo problem. But Leonardo's gift of abstraction was at war with his own experience, since his ability to abstract and rationalize man was baffled by the irrationality of evil, and his confidence in the rationality of nature itself was dissolved by the urge to self-destruction which he found at the heart of nature. The theory of vision which he had borrowed from Nicholas of Cusa, the theory of the Idiot, was based on immediacy and not on abstraction. And his attempt to assimilate 'learned ignorance' to his own rationalist premises failed, because the knowledge of the idiot is based on love for the object of knowledge. Love, in the Cusan scheme, is part of the hierarchy of loves which end in, and are part of, the love of God. But Leonardo's atheism knocked away the whole structure of the Cusan system;

the universe became to him a chaos of mathematical relations in which love played no necessary part. This contradicted his experience as an artist, but it was demanded by his experience as a scientist. He found, as Dürer was later to find and to record in his magnificent engraving, that the way of abstraction and pure reason is the way of melancholia. Leonardo therefore, like D. H. Lawrence and Rozanov in our own day, retreated from the world of spirit and deity to the world of animal life, nature, fertility. But here again he found reason still unreconciled with reality, for nature is inhuman, irrational, self-destructive. The warrior and the angel face one another, alienated for ever.

Now you see that the hope and desire of returning to the first state of chaos is like the moth to the light, and that the man who with constant longing awaits each new spring, each new summer, each new month and each new year—deeming that the things he longs for are ever too late in coming—does not perceive that he is longing for his own destruction. But this desire is the very quintessence, the spirit of the elements, which finding itself imprisoned with the soul is ever longing to return to the body of the giver. And you must know that this same longing is that quintessence, inseparable from nature, and that man is the image of the world.

The structure of ideas in this passage is Platonic, for in Nicholas of Cusa the quintessence is that fifth element which is the immanent soul of the universe, hence to return to the quintessence is for the Cusan to return to the universal soul and so to be united in God. In both Leonardo and the Cusan, man is the microcosm and the universe is reflected within him. But for Nicholas of Cusa the universe was order, held together by the rational will of God. Leonardo felt that the link between man and the animals was something irrational and daemonic, and in the apocalyptic drawings he entered into the experience of nature as self-annihilation. The return to nature is the return to destruction.

ROGER C. PEACE, Jr.

PERMANENCE

‘A purely human courage is required to renounce the temporal in order to gain the eternal . . . And yet it must be glorious to get the princess . . . and the knight of resignation who does not say it, is a deceiver . . . The only happy one is the heir apparent to the finite, whereas the knight of resignation is a stranger. By my own strength I am able to give up the princess, but by my own strength I am not able to get her again, for I am employing all my strength to be resigned. But by faith . . . by faith I shall get her *in virtue of the absurd.*’

S. K., *Fear and Trembling*

BRENAU asked me to sit down and wait while he finished touching up a canvas. Our breakfasts together had become habitual, the invitation understood.

As I watched him stand back from the easel, brush withdrawn, Brenau, with his lame foot resting comfortably aside, his eyes narrowed and head tilted majestically aloft, seemed for all reality an apparition of Ahab standing on his quarter-deck, ‘with a crucifixion in his face; in all the nameless regal overbearing dignity of some mighty woe’.

For a visionary like Brenau, the fact that one must wear a coil of flesh in order to *create* seemed a loathsome necessity—a waste of time, he called the impulse to bed some jocular female or to stand around with banal people replying to their inanities. Brenau even cursed the necessity of food—hated to waste time eating. To be continually at work, the fresh canvas before him, brush in hand, the smell of paints in the air—this was life to Emmet Brenau.

Like Ahab, ungodly and godlike, maimed and dedicated to one end, Brenau’s vision had driven him to the core of life, nullifying all sense of kinship with humanity. This monomania seemed to me essentially evil, for it demanded the sacrifice of love. At the same time, I envied him. . . . I was crippled, too, albeit imperceptibly: *déclassé*, a pariah by choice—to the relieved sigh of my former circle—and worst of all, a slave to those idols which Brenau had from the first so easily guessed. Often I felt in his melancholy glance, in those ageless unseeing eyes of genius, a mute accomplice in our losing struggle. My spirit found its reflection in Brenau as Joyce had felt himself in Bloom the Jew, an outcast forever consigned to peer in the candlelit windows.

Today Brenau had promised I should see the canvases for his new exhibit. After breakfast he limped up four darkened flights of stairs to a storeroom where one by one he brought forth painting after painting which evoked in every hue a world of strange intimacy and stranger immensity. I saw the exhibit of exhibits and was thrilled to the depths, for I have always held Vision queen of the senses.

There was tremendous scope and versatility in his work. Above all, I admired the large oils—those sombre faces of the possessed. There were nostalgic summer landscapes; tiny village scenes that were somehow sad; intense studies in black and white—each one a bizarre cameo of dream. The water-colours, mostly of Mexican vistas, revealed Brenau's true mastery of colour: only Gauguin or Renoir had conveyed a magic so lustrous.

He was certainly not a copyist of nature. With conscious artistry he opposed the spontaneous flow of nature. He believed Art superior to Nature: Art meant *form*, Nature the infinite—the formless sprawling canvas of the earth itself.

'I only paint the face behind the face,' he said matter-of-factly as he held up to the sunlight another exquisite oil. He glanced at me with a smile that lingered until a shadow eclipsed his eyes and he seemed to tighten inwardly. He stared at the canvas, paused as though brooding a confession, and said: 'Sometimes I wonder if, after all, the highest validity lies in Art . . . This endless search for the shadow of Truth often seems more illusory than the bourgeois illusions of rank, custom, divinity, and ownership. . . But I suppose one only follows his destiny, and I cannot abide the fleeting pleasures of the temporal. Only in the frozen serenity of the aesthetic does one feel the "slow rotation" of permanence.'

My naïve answer was that I, too, had always longed for some great emotional finality but that I could not decide whether to seek it in his olympian religion or in the natural deliverance of the human heart unto love. And he replied fervently, 'In art, only in art: *les dieux eux-mêmes meurent*'—as though it could not be refuted.

The dominant mood of Brenau's work echoed the eternal, unforgivable sadness of human life. I felt at once drawn to and repelled by these almost human shapes hurrying toward Nothingness. In their presence I seemed to hear the unanswerable cries of wounded children bereft in all the night-forests of the earth.

Later I recalled—for no reason except I knew most painters

sooner or later reproduce the form—among the paintings I had seen, there was not a single nude nor even a facial portrait of a woman.

I had heard that Brenau rarely looked at women. Many years ago he had loved one of his models, a pale and delicate Spanish girl; and one day, apropos of nothing, accused her of trying to destroy his art, picked up and flung the girl's clothes into her arms and ordered her from his studio. After that, he never painted a nude. In fact he has since avoided the use of models, clad or unclad, for any purpose at all. 'I have the image in the mind's eye,' he would declare with a shrug; 'why bother with reality?'

Just as Brenau liked to juxtapose extraordinary colours in his skies, I enjoyed plotting the admixture of inflammable human values. I confess, now in retrospect, that my purpose may have sprung from an unadmitted hatred of Brenau, or perhaps I was merely conscious of my own weakness and jealous of his ascetic power. . . . At any rate, whatever the motive, that evening I told Malia, the deft, unhurried one with the libertinish laugh, the whole story of Brenau. She listened dreamily and broke into a knowing smile as I led up to the climax, for she knew all the while that I had in mind asking her to pose for him.

Brenau had not realized when he advised me to destroy all possessions, that Malia was my only possession. . . . the only possession which possessed *me*. All other things meant less than nothing, possessed me not at all.

Not long ago our destinies commingled. Malia was then only nineteen, tall and heavy, with the faultless natural symmetry of ripe fruit. Outwardly decorous and reserved, always vague and inattentive, she moved in a liquid lustre of silence, her inward smile telling of her secret conversation with herself. Behind the speechless gravity of her glance, behind the stately poise of her bearing, there smouldered a nature so raw, so primitive in its frantic passion that her very presence aroused me far greater than the utmost intimacy with other women.

Of the other Malias I had known, there was none so supple and lithe as this dancing girl. . . . For years I have longed to forsake their madness—a road to those heights where dwell the rejecting and rejected philosophers. But each time, with a fever in my limbs, I find myself returned to the silken fold. Oh, I go on hoping that tomorrow I shall find my life's alexin: the Will to quit caressing



the serpent which devours me. Then and only then shall I have strength to breathe the air in the high province of Art.

I have always sought love on a grander scale than the crude genuflexion before the tomb of desire. The magic of candlelight casting unearthly shadows across a dancer's moving thighs; the clashing cymbal-sound of Malia's heavy bracelets—those huge noisy silver bracelets above her arms and ankles—piercing the stillness of the night as she dances for me alone . . . Sometimes when she would conclude her movements in a wild paroxysm and her upturned breasts rode with a great shaking to blind me with their tonguetip pinks and fill me with the perfume of musk-rose, I felt the night burst within my brain, as the resounding mission-bell shatters a distant wineglass. This feeling, I knew, far surpassed anything called love.

As time gradually liberated us from our pretences I began to enjoy in Malia the ecstasy of erotic contemplation. I really nurtured a deeper passion for the *idea* of Malia than for Malia herself—as the *thing remembered* grows sweeter to the mind than the thing itself. So overpowering is this feeling that often in her very presence I fail to connect it with the living, breathing girl who dances, the little worldling with the libertinish laugh. And at times she perceives my separateness and accuses me of being bored with her—not that she really cares, but, like most sensual women, Malia is petulant and vain.

On many a winter evening in my apartment, as she stood erect before me, clad only in those huge bracelets about her arms and ankles, while I breathed the cinnamon fragrance of her hair and watched the candlelight glorify the evil of her cruel silent face, there would come over me a whizzing impulse to strangle her. She exulted, I knew, and secretly laughed at my enslavement.

Malia never missed a chance to be amused, so of course she agreed to pose for Brenau. Strangely enough, to persuade Brenau himself was easier than I had dared imagine.

Next morning at breakfast I sat down in my customary chair and began discussing the perception of beauty . . . 'Think of your Renoir, who lay on his rheumatic side, warped for life, the brush fastened to his fist. Did he choose to dramatize his own suffering? Renoir sought only to express harmony—which he found in the marvellous natural rhythm of a woman's form.'

Brenau received this sort of argument impassively. A faint

smile crept over his face; with a shrug he agreed to paint Malia. 'And you shall have the portrait to keep if you like.'

Words could hardly convey my gratitude. It would be wonderful to have any specimen of Brenau's work, especially a canvas of such priceless sentimental value.

'But your theories of the artist are quite mistaken,' he told me indifferently. 'It is clear that you have not reached the point from which there's no turning back.'

'And where is that?'

'The circle of the doomed. Where you look God in the eyes . . . and die—that is to say, you realize thenceforth that *fasting is your destiny*.' Brenau moved over to the window and stood there looking out, his arms clasped behind him. 'As for Renoir, he never permitted life to obstruct his destiny. Do you know why Michael Angelo could infuse his canvases with such tremendous feeling? Because he found life unsatisfactory, or *wished* to find it so, in order that *living* might not usurp the passion he jealously preserved for his work. He locked himself in the Sistine for fifty-four months, existing on bread and water. That's all he needed or wanted—bread and water. Ruthless self-denial is the *sine qua non* of creativity.'

'Isn't some compromise possible?'

Brenau laughed indulgently and said: 'No one has discovered a compromise. Our failure to re-create the Classical may be traced to the Faustian soul, which, drawn by nature to the passion of the moment, dreams languidly of the eternal but goes on giving in to the fury of its heritage . . . Think of your Racine: when life finally touched Racine, death touched the unborn Phaedras of his future. He was finished. He had found his little bourgeoisie. . . Is that what you want?—a little bourgeoisie? Oh I keep forgetting that you have one. Happiness, it is called.' He turned to look at me and sighed, 'Well, Norlin, don't think me inhuman. I like the pleasures of this world, but first of all I am an artist . . . If ever I stopped being an artist, I should then be completely a man.'

'But you have reached the circle of the doomed,' I protested. 'Such a renunciation is impossible, even if you wished it.'

'It is possible—for *me*. Why? Because I am destined to reach perfection,' he said in the same unconcerned way. 'This is not monstrous egotism, my friend. For years I have sensed a terrible unifying force lurking within me, and some day, through some

unimaginable stimulus, this force will arise and unfold itself in a work of burning purity—a purity almost unbearable to human eyes. Within my heart lies an image of the loveliness which has not yet come into the world. Do not feel surprised if I succeed; and when I do, I shall never paint again, I shall begin living.’

‘Good. I think you should by all means arrange to live for awhile.’

‘Not until I reach perfection,’ he replied with disinterested honesty.

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When I telephoned Brenau to say I was leaving town for a week he declared that the portrait would be finished before I returned. ‘Have her come at eight tomorrow,’ he said casually. ‘I will work from eight to twelve.’

He seemed pleased at my enthusiasm, and emphasized that he would like me, of all the people he knew, to have a fine specimen of his work. Again I thanked him profusely.

I made the arrangements with Malia. She demurred a little at getting up so early, complaining that a woman couldn’t look her best at eight in the morning.

That evening while my fingers fretted with the closures of her *lamé* gown, I trembled to think that soon her young loveliness would be mine forever, mine without the exigencies of desire . . . With a soft lowering rustle, like the night-flutter of an owl’s wing, her clothes made a silver puddle on the moonlit floor, and she stepped over to the window and pulled the cord which latticed the moonlight. Her proud breasts quivered at each footstep as she drew near me. I felt the moth-touch of her hands hovering about me: cool almond fragrance. Then with splendid dexterity she enwrapped me all at once and bade me speak no more.

*Happiness* it was called, this golden flash of time wherein centuries and hours dissolve like rain. Upon eternal clouds my spirit should have soared; instead there droned in my anguished mind only this savage chant: *animal idolater, you are the possessed, not the possessor. . . the tyranny of the flesh challenges God. . . animal idolater, you are the*

*possessed not the possessor* whispered the train-wheels next day as I sat looking through the window at the plains of wheat swaying in the summer air. As I leaned back and closed my

eyes, the vision of Malia danced before me in slow undulations, and while her shoulders throbbed and her breasts rose and fell, I caught myself smiling quite cynically at the little will-o'-the-wisp who, like Raphael's *demi-monde* virgins of his day, stood destined for the high province of Art.

Malia had said vaguely that she would miss me but did not so much as ask when I might return. Ours was indeed a soulless infatuation, without identity, with the arid impersonality of desire—and more than the usual touch of madness. I felt relieved to escape for awhile, aware that distance alone could conjure the tower which never arose from my insubstantial will. Then, too—away from Brenau I felt another, more indefinable nuance of freedom. He had somehow dominated me. In our conversations he had really been talking with himself; I had proved a convenient, living echo for the phantom of his own consciousness.

I thought of the night we met. . . Brenau had looked miserable there among the cocktail artists. He had moved among them blindly, his crucifix invisible, his head tilted majestically aloft—an earthbound eagle whose eyes betrayed to the indifferent world an image of its own self-betrayal. And indeed I wondered then if his lonely work so consumed him that he lived beyond and above the ordinary social feelings—those feelings which define the human being, not the artist. I wondered, too, if he shared my belief that achievement is not stimulating, fame exciting nor perfection itself glorious unless one loves and is loved.

Brenau had always held fame more or less contemptible—a patronage conferred by usurers and their bedfellows, the braying mob. And now that his name, long renowned among artists, had really begun to spread beyond his own locale, Brenau had withdrawn more and more in order to save himself. Hence it was not unreasonable that at first he looked askance at my cordiality; perhaps he thought I wished in some way to ingratiate myself with the famous. But it was for no trivial reason that I sought out Brenau: I felt that an artist with his transcendent air of dedication, his tenacity of mission—which I sensed about him immediately—could somehow lead me to a resurrection of the artist over the human being. But it so happened, in our months together he never deviated much from his original impression—that I was a useless dilettante—and at last I began to realize that his daemonic certitude was his alone.

Two days before my scheduled return, I telephoned Malia. Her tone seemed newly distant. Laughingly I suggested she might have given me up for Brenau, and this evoked a scolding, coy little tinkle of denial; then her voice grew harsh with mockery and she reminded me that after all it was my idea to have her pose, she was doing it only to please me, she despised getting up early.

The portrait would be finished, she said, after one more sitting. How did it look? Was it good?

Well, it didn't look like *her*. In fact she didn't know if it was a 'picture' at all.

After talking with her, I stood silently in grim reflection. I began to wonder if anything had actually happened. Indeed, the idea had been merely to dislodge Brenau momentarily from his pedestal—this, and nothing more—for though I disliked Malia intensely, she had become so convenient and essential that I would be lost if anyone took up permanently with my deft and pensive one.

I imagined her outstretched in the radiance of her long heavy limbs, her bold eyes inviting Brenau . . . But how foolish to concern myself: Brenau would cast out anyone who tried to 'destroy' him as an artist. Nevertheless his personality must have attracted Malia; his physical deformity would, of course, render him more interesting to her; his mysterious air, his genuine indifference would taunt and challenge her. In this respect, I had often observed her childish reactions: the man who tried could get nowhere with Malia; the indifferent one she pursued at all cost.

I longed to see the portrait and decided to return tomorrow evening . . . The portrait? . . . Did I not wish rather to see Malia herself? . . . Ah, perhaps it was this very feeling—this contemplative aesthetic—which carried over into life, was alienating her—as in those angry moments when she realized my separateness and accused me of being bored with her. But, as I have confessed, I secretly nurtured a far deeper passion for the *idea* of Malia than for Malia herself. So why should I pretend to delight in the jack-knife reiterations of love?

Yet I knew Malia could never find *this* with Brenau . . . or could she? I recalled the hypnotic spirit which glowed from his canvases and wondered if he could transmit in life this same bewitching power.

Immediately after arriving in town I called Malia. A hesitant

voice parried rather bluntly, asked my name, and finally decided Malia was not at home.

I would see Brenau then, right away. While I was unpacking, the bell rang and a deliveryman brought in a large pasteboard crate marked 'fragile' on one side and 'oil painting' on the other. I signed the receipt-book, tore open the envelope attached to the crate, and found in Brenau's handwriting this unsigned note: 'Norlin, here is the portrait. From now on I shall be very busy and unable to breakfast with you. When you have studied the portrait, perhaps you'll understand. I told you not to feel surprised.'

So great was my anxiety to see the painting that I hardly stopped to ponder the significance of the note. While tearing away the cardboard and paper-tissue I reflected that after all if Brenau had stolen Malia, the victory was really mine—was this not the real Malia? I was unwrapping her now, this creature whose mellowness, stolen from Time, would never die . . . But whether reality lies in Time, or beyond, I do not pretend to know.

After uncovering the last tissue, I stepped back towards the middle of the room. I do not exaggerate in saying it took my breath away. It was every stroke the masterpiece I had expected.

Under a morning sky Malia lay in naked languor beside the sea—not a sea that one finds in nature, nor even in the works of the old masters. Again it was the image of Brenau's tortured soul: a sea of contemplation, a brooding immensity which must have submitted wearily to adventure but secretly existed for its own sake and listened only to the wind.

Brenau had resolved the discord of formless mass into a jewel of unity. It was music. Everything linear dissolved so magically before the eye it was impossible to tell where or how one's vision passed from the finite into the infinite. My glance wandered with a terrifying sense of freedom, for there was no horizon: the melting contours and the invisible sun formed an orchestration of light, with endless overtones of green and blue. As I felt the sweeping brush-strokes convolve like thunder-clouds, I realized anew the tragic import of the ever-changing, never-changing sea—reminder of man's finite impasse.

The heavy limbs of the woman flowed from the coil and recoil of the ocean, and together the woman and the sea revealed a strange metaphysical conspiracy, a dreamlike harmony of limbs

and waves, a rhythm too deep for comprehension . . . In Malia, Brenau had projected the measurable rhythms of the Hellenic body against that Faustian invention of the West: the infinite. These extremes seemed to bypass the centuries and meet quite naturally, though it was truly for the first time. The tremor of future worlds Brenau had evoked with the liberating passion of music. Never before on canvas had the symbol of the western soul—*pure infinite space*—blended so perfectly with the measurable, the classic, the purely sensuous present. Brenau had triumphed over the Infinite.

The image of Malia, primeval and solitary, against the blending wainscot of heaven and ocean seemed almost extra-dimensional. Her small Slavic head was turned aside, tide-bent, her hair lay in folds about her shoulders, and her breasts encircled with glowing soft tan their delicate circles of pink. And in the aura of her cruel silent face I beheld more vividly than ever the shadow of that dumb godless force of insensible evil before which all humanity lies prostrate.

Formless images whirled through my brain—a glissando of heavy limbs, more violent than the monstrous ocean itself. Then as I turned blindly away, all at once I realized Brenau's intention: within the very life of *the artist* dwells this same spectre of evil—a smothering immensity of Instinct. She it was, the phantom who had writhed forever on the shores of my heart's dark island. . . The opiate torrent of her night-song, like the wavel cadence of the sea, had enveloped the precision of my thought each time I sought escape—and returned me to that awful apparition of the Infinite.

At that moment I had fallen upon the answer to the long enigma: she was mine now without longing, with the constancy of death—which is only an image of the constancy of Art. Now could I seclude myself beneath this shadow of the Infinite, and thereby discover *form* itself. No more would the inner demon drive me seaward; hereafter my spirit would reflect the precision of an alpine lake—some jewel classically arranged in a grey socket of hills.

I was free at last. And by contemplating *her* liberation thus might I retain my freedom. Like the maiden on the Urn, removed from the havoc of the temporal, the little worldling stood before me endowed with harmony, form, and permanence—a magic impossible except through the transubstantiation of Art.



As I lay there for hours intoxicated by the marvel of contour, I realized for the first time the extent of my divorce from reality . . . *Concupiscentia oculorum* (Gautier's 'lust of the eye')—the ultimate flight of the imagination—had finally exacted its price. For there is no road back from this plane where Vision, queen of the senses, tolerates no other gods. And from the moment I breathed the first lofty current of air, I felt the Malia-of-the-flesh, together with her sordid predecessors, fade into the void of unremembered days.

It was after midnight when I awoke from this incredible trance.

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Overnight I had turned into the observer who understands the inconsequence of all human action. A strange health-of-the-soul had come over me: this, I knew, was the climate in the circle of the doomed. Thenceforth, *fasting* would be my destiny and I should find no *camaraderie* essential to my mission. In the realm of spirit I would find a detachment so authentic, a compassion so uninvolved that never again could I be ensnared by the human dilemma.

Hence Brenau's abrupt note caused me as little annoyance as Malia's apparent desertion. I no longer cared what their relationship might have become, if indeed it had developed at all. I lacked the curiosity ever to call her again. But I went to say good-bye to Brenau—I had decided to leave the city once for all—and though the visit meant nothing, it was a simple gesture of gratitude.

He came out in the hall and stood there rather than ask me in. His face seemed haggard, his eyes more defiant than ever; his old preoccupied air, his reticence in the presence of strangers was there again to indicate no bond existed between us. He seemed almost unaware of my presence. The conversation struck a distantly cordial note and lasted only a few minutes. Neither of us mentioned Malia. . . I wondered all the while if he had left her waiting inside the studio.

Brenau said nothing in reply to my praise of the portrait. I asked politely about the progress of any new work.

'I shall never paint again,' he said softly as though addressing himself. 'I have freed myself from the tyrannical impulse to create. I have triumphed over Time, and now I may return to live in its stupid disorder. I have reached perfection.'

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I agreed that he had indeed . . . from some unimaginable stimulus. And did he find this perfection glorious unless he loved and was loved? 'Well, Brenau, I came to say good-bye and to leave with you my niche in the world of compromise. I am ready to begin.'

'An excellent time to begin,' said Brenau with utmost irony, '—twilight in the West.'

'Thank you for liberating me from my only possession.'

'Don't thank *me*. A man follows his own destiny, listens only to the inner demon—if he's a man,' said Emmet Brenau, and without looking at me, turned swiftly and limped up the stairs.

'You mean: *if he's an artist*, don't you?' I called after him with a melancholy smile. But Brenau had already shut the door of his studio.

I went out, feeling as though I had left my flesh, like offal, there on the vestibule floor.

That night while I glanced from the train window across the moonlit fields, I wondered if Brenau were really finished or this incident the mere whim of an extreme artist-nature. . . I imagined Brenau in his studio with Malia, musing dreamily to himself: 'No more the static cameos of unreality. . . No more the finite simulacra of Life's infinite beauty and mystery. . . Now I have the *living* jewel before me always.'

LÉON KOCHNITZKY

ESTEBAN FRANCÈS

'ABSTRACTEUR DE QUINTESENCE'

THE days of the great discoveries are over. The *Terrae Incognitae* first sighted by intrepid pioneers such as Marcel Duchamp, the three great masters of Cubism and, some years later, by Giorgio de Chirico, Mondrian and Klee, are now open to colonization. Thousands of emigrants, Europeans as well as Americans, have settled in St. Brandan's islands. I mean in the world and space of so-called abstract forms, where they live on natural riches of soil, rivers and sky. They have found security, a middle-class, academic

way of living. They tread the beaten paths. Each of them produces very acceptable derivative Miros, fake Ernsts, *ersatz* Klees and of course, counterfeit Picassos.

A comparison between the prodigious achievements in the field of abstract and non-representative painting in the period 1910-40, and the laborious, mediocre production of the years 1940-50, is painful.

In this decade, the painters who remained faithful to the representation of three-dimensional forms, according to a more or less total acceptance of the laws of classic perspective, have created more beautiful, more important and more diversified works than the timid followers and successors of Duchamp, Picasso, Klee and Miro. We need not recall the stupendous developments of such talented artists (all of them having attained full recognition by 1940), as Tchelitchev, Berman, Leonor Fini, Baltus, Leonid; nor the *frisson nouveau* we owe to those two painters of Seattle, Mark Tobey and Morris Graves; nor the whimsical lyricism of Dorothy Tannings; nor the wonderful stories told by the Italian Usellini, by the Haitian primitive; nor the epic—if somewhat clumsy—grandeur of Paul Delvaux! Some of these painters may have been under the spell of Surrealism. None of them—not even Mark Tobey—may be called an *abstractionist* in the sense one would apply to a work by Mondrian, Tanguy or Kandinsky.

—*What pretension it is to label creative artists as you would label bottles of wine or pots of jam!*—

It is a purely negative kind of labelling. And besides, we all know that real abstraction in painting is inconceivable. At the most, the painter may be an *abstracteur de quintessence*, to use the delightful expression of Rabelais. And the *quintessence* is always to some degree related to reality. Except for purely automatic painting, no plastic art can be entirely estranged from reality, because the indestructible bond between painting and reality is the personality of the artist. There exists a pictorial *cogito*: '*Je peins, donc je suis*', and it creates a transcendental unity between the painter (subject) and the painting (object). Therefore it is absurd to imagine a human being creating anything that is cut from all ties with reality. Crystals, pebbles and roots are beautiful forms. It does not lie in the power of an artist to create them. Whenever he attempts to modify them even slightly—as your great Henry Moore has done so often with such perfect grace and skill—he

changes—*du même coup* the natural (or if you allow me to say), the God-begotten object into a product of his own physical craft, intellectual work and ethical aims.

—*You seem to forget all about the methods of knowledge that have little to do with classic philosophy. To escape his rational prison, man was given many tools: the subconscious, dreams, pre-natal memories, automatism, mystic knowledge . . . even play . . . —*

But in the field of plastic art, these tools do not work. With the exception of the poor little inventions of automatic drawing, you could not show me a canvas painted by the subconscious of an artist, or by a dreaming painter, or by one under the spell of a mystic illumination.

Both musicians and poets find themselves in a better position to release the ties of reason and also to evade conceptual reality. But the more a painter tries to penetrate the world of fantasy and the unreal, the more his work appears as the result of conscious and intelligent will. When Salvador Dali shows us mosquito-legged elephants, he reminds me of the charming Polish saying: 'If my aunt had wheels, she would be a tramway-car.'

During the past decade, the masters of the previous generation have produced admirable canvases and renewed their former inspiration: Picasso of course, and next to him, Tanguy, Miro, Ernst. But the newcomers have generally failed. Mediocre and laborious: I think these heavy adjectives qualify the works of most of these newcomers in the field of so-called abstract art. In Europe they have been numerous; in America, innumerable.

To my best knowledge, however, three artists, perhaps four, but by no means five, have escaped the general mediocrity: Matta, Wilfredo Lam and Esteban Francès.

Is it a mere coincidence that all three share in common an Iberian heritage? That they are but distantly related to the *École de Paris*? That they have created their works in America, whether in Latin America or in the U.S.A.? As for the *École de Paris*, when I said 'perhaps four', I was thinking of the few but very striking semi-abstract paintings of Jacques Hérold.

The readers of HORIZON are, I believe, acquainted with works of both Lam and Matta; perhaps also with Hérold's paintings. But Esteban Francès is still unknown in Europe.

In 1944, when I first saw seven or eight of his canvases at the

Durlacher Gallery, in New York, I felt the kind of *spiritual shock* which all art lovers have experienced, something like falling in love at first sight.

A youthful discoverer, wandering in a world that discloses new treasures everyday, lives miranda-like, under the spell of his own discoveries. But when a man has been looking at pictures for thirty or forty years, the spiritual shock is rare: every new experience is linked to some earlier impression. According to the rule of classical psychology known as Höfdding's law of totalization, mere detail of form or colour is enough to crystallize the onlooker's previous *état d'âme*.

Following this introspective analysis, I shall confess, although closely pursuing the artistic evolution of various countries, I had not felt such a spiritual shock since I first saw the Chinese paintings at the Burlington exhibition of 1936.

An extraordinary polyphony in red, black, and gold, was the first sensation. Next, I could observe a great ingenuity in the blending; curious mixtures of forms, not all unknown to me, but most of them presented in some strange and surprising way; a gift for composition—so rare among non-representational painters—and at the same time an expression of material space that could be described as a series of perspective splits in the 'metaphysical-Chirico' space.

These were by no means abstract paintings. None of them contained the alluring decorative elements that render so many 'pure abstracts' similar to the geometric figures of the Kaleidoscope or to *ready-made* patterns for gowns and wallpaper; nor was there a realistic detail to be found in any of them. The forms were tormented, ghostly, cataclysmic, but logical in their own way and perfectly familiar: cosmic and animal, vegetal and mineral, earthly and celestial. The distortion was not *direct* as, for instance, in the case of the image of a haystack by Van Gogh or of a wine 'pichet' by Picasso. It was, I should say, an interpretation of the 'second degree'.

If we consider Francès's representation of animals, there is no doubt that on the canvas entitled 'El Fuego', two, three or more roosters may be seen. But the artist added to their distorted bodies small spheroid elements, not unlike those that appear on the ancient celestial maps, marking the principal stars of a constellation. So that the roosters are roosters in the same sense that *Ursa Magna* is a

bear or a chariot, and *Leo*, a lion; they might evoke 'imaginary constellations', personal and fantastic descriptions of an unthought of sky. Planets and asteroids can be sighted in most of Francès's canvases. Differing in colour and size, they sometimes resemble the astrological symbols of Sun or Moon, and sometimes the figures of the game of *tarots*, and perhaps even the flaming rockets of a firework . . . I would not call these forms allusive or symbolical, and still less allegoric. They result from superimposed visual analogies, and recall to mind the images of modern lyrical poetry; they are *metaphysical*, as true poetic creation is.

In 'El Abejorro', two flying figures dominate the upper part of the composition, like the angels of extermination in traditional pictures of the Last Judgement. In 'Aurora', two fantastic birds are contending for the possession of a black sphere floating in the sky and reminding one of '*Le soleil noir de la Mélancolie*'.<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to discuss the influences on Esteban Francès. Nevertheless, pictorial 'souvenirs' are visible in his paintings. The ascending floor-boards of early Chirico perspective ('rail-tracks' joining in a multiple vanishing-point), the waving arms with claw-like hands of Picasso's 'Guernica', some *contour-figures* (birds, whales) that have escaped from the Miro menagerie . . . you can easily identify them. But we certainly cannot reproach Francès for having studied the works of his best fellow-painters as well as the game of *tarots* or the celestial maps.

These forms though borrowed, are resettled in a new climate, where they become entirely different from what they were in their primitive *habitat*. Francès's method is opposed to that of so many young painters, who like to make a display of what they believe to be their own fantasy, in a setting (both technical and spiritual) that does not belong to them, but that was built and constructed by Picasso, Ernst, Miro, Tanguy or Klee. Here lies the great importance of Francès's discoveries. He has created—if not a world of his own—at least a space, a setting, a stage for his vision, that is completely original. I would not be astonished to see, very soon, some carefully scrupulous 'modernist' steal the Francès 'video' and, as one says on Broadway, 'run away with the show'.

<sup>1</sup> There is a great probability that the last line of the sonnet by Gérard de Nerval, '*El Desdichado*', was inspired by Dürer's *Melancholia*, so that the *soleil noir* has run along an orb revolving from the plastic arts (Dürer), to French Romanticism (Nerval), and back to the plastic arts (Francès).

Now you may ask Francès: 'What next?' or in plain French: 'Où est-ce que ça mène?' Such pictures like the cubist Picassos of 1911, or the best early Chiricos, cannot be painted more than once. For an artist as exceptionally creative, there exists a necessity for renewal. He must make new discoveries or paint no more.

Francès's only concession to the necessity of making a living (he is married and the father of a little boy), was to accept commissions to execute the sets for the New York Ballet Society. There also, he displayed a sense of Castilian grandeur. Both sets and costumes for Stravinsky's *Renard* were worthy of this beautiful *fabliau*. Having to deal with roosters, foxes and cats, Francès felt perfectly at ease and realized, on a three-dimensional plan, a picture very similar to his best. He was not so successful with his treatment of Rudi Revil's *Zodiac*. Again the painter was in his natural element among representations of stars and planets. His astrological figure of the Sun remains unforgettable. But the costumes, hastily designed and carelessly executed, probably with not enough time and not enough money, did not approach the perfection of those made for *Renard*. Besides, the lights on the stage were poorly balanced. *Zodiac*, one of the most agreeable and thoroughly theatrical productions ever staged by the Ballet Society, with its rough, youthful and healthy score, was a complete failure. I have not seen the sets designed by Francès for *Beauty and the Beast*. But, listening to Edith Sitwell's *Façade*, last winter, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, I was charmed by the pair of transparent curtains (a variation on the theme of masks) Francès executed for this somewhat nostalgic performance of a work which, if only for the phrenetic rhythms of the poems, does not show its age.

Francès, who is now thirty-five, has not painted many pictures. Is he to be blamed for this scarcity (or should we call it restraint)? I do not think so. The life of an artist beginning his creative activity in the mid-thirties of this century was a painful adventure. It required physical strength and moral courage. Esteban Francès was born in Port-Bou, the Spanish border town, well known to all refugees and fugitives from Nazi-ruled Europe. Amidst the turmoils of the Spanish Civil War, World War II, the collapse of artistic life in occupied France, the flight to the New World, the beginning of a new career in Mexico, the pursuing of this career



in New York, it is remarkable that Esteban should paint at all, producing these huge canvases or panels leisurely constructed, with ease and art. Apart from any critical judgement, it is evident that he toils. And he toils carefully. There is no place for '*pochades*' of any kind in his painting: even if automatism has a part in his inspiration, it is an automatism '*au ralenti*', that proceeds more like the budding of a tree than like the toothed gearing of a machine.

In every work of his, there is an atmosphere of play in which he delights and this is of great charm to the onlooker. Not that the game is always cheerful: it is sometimes tragic and as full of blood and suspense as a successful *corrida*. But the painter acts as a puppeteer, wanting to be his own spectator, though unable to participate in his tragic or comic inventions. This non-romantic attitude is exceptional among young painters. It reminds one of Rossini in the field of music (strange as it may be, the first association that crept into my mind when I saw the paintings of Francès, was to the Overture to *Semiramide*). With his talent of abandoning the laws of gravity, the rules of perspective, the rhythm of human breath and heart-beating, *Francès enriches us with a new kind of freedom*. Picasso, in all his glory, like Beethoven, only renders us more conscious of the chains that keep us in bondage, of the awful lot of man. Francès, like Rossini, brings us a liberation. Illusory, ephemeral, wanton. It might be. But still a liberation. A challenge to destiny.

RAYMOND MORTIMER

## HOMAGE TO BERNARD BERENSON

HE lives among paintings by Domenico Veneziano, Sassetta, Cima, Signorelli, with the fullest, finest, best-tended private library I have ever seen. His villa has the serene, unostentatious elegance proper to Tuscany; below it the hillside has been terraced into a garden, which was created to meet his wishes, though it looks centuries old with its avenue of tall, steepled cypresses, its pools and statues and pebble-patterned steps. Those fortunate enough to be his guests in spring wake to hear the rustle of

brooms sweeping up petals fallen from the azaleas. All around are the olives and vineyards of his *podere*, in the valley between the Settignano of Desiderio and the Maiano of Benedetto. Florence, a few miles away, is hidden by a spur, on which a church and erstwhile monastery are grouped as if for the background of a *Quattrocento* picture; and no less 'composed'—such harmonies being here traditional and, as it were, spontaneous—are the castles and farm-buildings on every hill in the vast, billowing landscape of the Valdarno which his house commands.

His presence is delicate and altogether civilized, like his surroundings. A sage in Chinese ivory, he moves with a springy briskness suggesting that he is less fragile than at first he seems; and his nervous energy is in fact astonishing, for in the intervals between his persistent studies—at luncheon, tea, dinner—a daily and unremitting flow of visitors finds him welcoming and always vivid. Many are old friends; but many, too, are pilgrims, shy novices in the mystery of connoisseurship, or ruthless sightseers determined not to miss a man who has become, like Mount Vernon or Monticello, a national monument.

The talk flashes from English to Italian, to French, to German; from persons to painting, then to literature, then history, then politics. He is a virtuoso in conversation, by which I mean that, like Rubinstein, he is not merely brilliant but most winning and intuitive. Though his omniscience may alarm or disconcert, this does not prevent him from stimulating the talk of others and listening to it with eagerness. Before he begins to flag—and I should have tired far sooner—he rises and makes his farewells; whereupon the company disperses, invigorated by his wit, instructed by his learning, caressed by his charm, and convinced that here at last is a man favoured by the gods, exceptional alike in his gifts and the complete use he has made of them; an enviably full man, who has realized his hopes, so shaping his life that it has been rounded into a work of art not incomparable with the masterpieces to which it has been chiefly devoted.

His *Sketch for a Self-Portrait* (Constable, 10s.)—an enthralling book—seeks to dispel any such auspicious impression. He suffers, it reveals, from the illusion (how right he is to call it an illusion!) that he has dissipated his life, that he is a failure, that he has dwindled into an expert upon painting, when he could have flowered into a philosopher in all the arts, or else a Greek scholar

or, who knows, a statesman or a novelist. The reasons for this frustration he discovers in his need to earn a living, and in the 'debauchery' of reading and travel. Then he turns to describe himself as a talker, who should have lived in a conversational age, and to protest that he has little gift for literary composition, and has failed to acquire its technique. (No, but his writing is uneven: the felicities so frequent in his talk are sometimes not carefully enough constructed in print.) Not only has he wasted his public powers, he continues, but he has lacked the gift of inspiring confidence and loyalty; is looked upon as impatient, arrogant, alarming, even dishonest; and is therefore widely unpopular.

To make a success of life seems to me estimable, encouraging and exemplary. It is not only public personages such as Pericles, St. Teresa, Rubens, Goethe, and Macaulay, that give me a glow, but parsons, anglers, schoolmistresses, wheelwrights, when by some accident their happiness has been made public. Mr. Berenson's lamentations therefore vex me: he seems to have so very much less cause than most people for complaint or remorse. Is it a fine humility that leads him to denigrate his achievements, or is it *amour propre*—I wonder crossly—that makes him fancy himself so much superior to all that he has achieved? Probably the two warring states of mind are here allied.

How ungrateful, I feel again, are his groans over not being liked! No one with uncommon gifts can use these without making enemies among those who are lazy, clumsy, unlucky or plain dull, and some also among those rivals who enjoy an equal success. To be clever, to be rich, even to enjoy oneself, will always provoke jealousy and envy. More often than not those who thus unwillingly make enemies are little conscious of this misfortune. Mr. Berenson is acutely aware, and suffers. Even so, surely it is by our friends whom we see, not by our enemies whom we can avoid, that our talent for personal relations should be judged; and Mr. Berenson, though in his book he wickedly suppresses the fact, is exceptionally blessed in the multitude, the quality and the devotion of his friends; and lives surrounded by those who can and do anticipate his every wish, such are their affection and intelligence.

Nobody is thus rich in friends undeservedly. The young Berenson, I suspect, may have seemed provocatively conscious of his various superiorities. The English Public School trains us

to regard self-praise as the most unforgivable of sins (which does not prevent us from blowing our own trumpets in a subtler fashion). In the United States, where Mr. Berenson was educated, the young are submitted to no such taboo. Nor are they in France, I may add; and the result is much international misunderstanding. In any case Mr. Berenson has known how to age with extreme elegance, avoiding the two faults most usual among the long-lived. He indulges neither in querulity nor in censoriousness (except about contemporary painting and verse). He suffers even fools with an appearance of gladness, unless they are pretentious or otherwise ill-bred. For he is rich in the quality which he defines in the following words:

Humour is not concerned with improving people. It accepts them as they are with their faults and foibles, chuckling over the one and putting up with the others, so long as these last do not too seriously interfere with the rights, the comfort and the safety of others. It arises from a gentle pessimism: the conviction that people are like that, and will not soon be otherwise, better make the best of it. Seeing that they can't change, why torment them and yourself by interfering, trying to shape them after your patterns, forcing them into your own moulds? Live and let live. Take them humorously. Be amused by what in them is quaint, absurd, ridiculous.

The last infirmity of noble minds, I have noticed, is apt to be an obsession with politics. Why this should afflict men like Mr. Berenson, who have given their lives to finer and more smiling fields, I cannot well understand. Even Mr. Santayana, at the age of eighty-five, in the retirement of a convent near Santo Stefano Rotondo, has abandoned the realm of essence in order to ruminate and reveal the principles of government. No doubt politicians inflict upon us now a greater variety of misfortunes than ever before. Acts of Hitler, or of Stalin, spread calamity on a scale previously reserved for what are misotheistically called 'Acts of God'. Mr. Berenson has had his house occupied by German soldiery, and many of his pictures pulverized by dynamite. He has spent months in hiding, and weeks under fire from artillery. It is natural that he should now watch with alarm a Europe menaced by the follies of the Right and the ferocities of the Left. Natural, yes; but, if I moan whenever my friends give much of their

thought to political matters, it is just because these usually do excite alarm, and this is unenjoyable as well as unavailing.

To seem happy in old age is the achievement of not many women, and of far fewer men; and it is only the happy, be they saints or worldlings, that a reasonable man can take as models or instructors. (Some unhappy lives, of course, can be cautionary, those for instance of Baudelaire, Heine, and both the Lawrences.) Mr. Berenson not only seems happy, but admits his happiness. Women of the world kindle his enjoyment by their good manners, the young of both sexes by their good looks. He chides himself because he still itches for transitive activities, and in particular has to write every day on pain of feeling guilt; he complains also of fatigue. His chief sorrow is for loss of leisure, of the sense that there is a vast fund of hours with which to be prodigal. On the other hand, 'all ambition is spent', he tells us, 'all envy, all jealousy'.

I am so fitted now to take in, to appreciate, to worship not only beauty in nature and in art, but that beauty of holiness (to which I have always been sensitive) and of that most wonderful of all masterpieces, a man or woman morally, intellectually and physically satisfactory. Even the full possession of one of those qualities, provided that it does not reject the others, enshrines the individual in a halo of whole-hearted admiration, and I enjoy him as a great work of art.

'It is easy now', he goes on, 'to live in ecstasy', and he gives the name of IT to whatever brings this ecstasy, every experience that is ultimate, valued for its own sake. In a passage that shows how fine an eloquence he can command, he dwells upon his happiness in the aesthetic contemplation of natural beauty.

I wonder whether art has a higher function than to make us feel, appreciate and enjoy natural objects for their art value? So, as I walk in the garden, I look at the flowers and shrubs and trees and discover in them an exquisiteness of contour, a vitality of edge or a vigour of spring as well as an infinite variety of colour that no artifact I have seen in the last sixty years can rival. And beyond the garden, as I walk on the olive-crowned, pine-plumed, cypress-guarded hills, I enjoy the effect of clouds under the high and spacious dome of the sky, the hazes between me and the horizon toward Siena, toward Volterra, toward

Pisa, toward Carrara—hazes leaden on dull days, silvery in the winter, pearly in spring and autumn, and golden at midsummer. Each day, as I look, I wonder where my eyes were yesterday. Why did I not perceive the beauty of that lichen-trimmed tree-trunk as gorgeous as an Aztec or Maya mosaic; of that moss of a soft emerald that beds your eye as reposefully as the greens in a Giorgione or Bonifazio; and why had I been blind to the jewelled elaboration of the honeysuckle and to the enamelled elegance of the purplish-black and ruby butterfly that flutters about those slopes? . . . I do not even have to look at pictures, for I have become my own painter and can see 'in nature' more beauty than they can reveal to me in their compositions. I require no sculpture, because my imagination has become so moulding that having about me such models as the Tuscan peasantry I can visualize them as statues in movement.

When Mr. Berenson wishes to praise a work of art, a landscape or a friend, his favourite epithet is 'life-enhancing'. He is unconditionally, exultantly, securely, a humanist. Almost always as men grow older, they fancy that everything is going to the dogs, their environment becoming a looking-glass that reflects their own decline. Not so Mr. Berenson—presumably because he has declined so little. Though he regards himself as a failure, though he has lived to see the human race hurl itself down a Gadarene steep, his belief in the value of life and the future of mankind remains impregnable.

I am not competent to enter into his system of aesthetics. I fail to understand just what he means by 'tactile values', without which artifacts cannot, he declares, be 'life-enhancing'. The phrase means something subtler than three-dimensional representation. (He admires Sieneese, and Chinese, painting; he does not admire Caravaggio.) On the other hand I can profit by his discourses on 'ideated sensations'. 'What the artist has to do is to oblige the spectator to feel as if he were the object represented, and to imagine its functional processes to the extent required by this representation.' (This comes from his *Aesthetics and History in the Visual Arts*, which has already appeared in the U.S.A. and which is due for publication here in the spring: it brims with liveliness and wisdom.)

Mr. Berenson characteristically defines art as an instrument for humanizing mankind. It is this principle (applied, I think, too

narrowly) which has made him usually hostile to the best painting of our time. In the *Sketch for a Self-Portrait* he recalls that before the First World War he wrote to a newspaper in defence of Matisse. As early as 1896, I may add, in his book on Florentine painting he went out of his way to exalt Cézanne—the first writer in English, I suspect, to do this. Nevertheless, his antagonism to contemporary painting has been violent. Here in my opinion—I cannot well conceal it even in these notes which are intended as a tribute—he has shown himself sadly unfair, thus alienating many among his juniors who otherwise might have become his most congenial admirers, and delighting the silliest Philistines, who boast of his support.

Like most of his friends, I bewail (though not without a chuckle) this touch of *gutta serena*. At the same time I find myself more and more in sympathy with the principle responsible for it. Though still enthusiastic for Picasso and Braque, I have come to lament their asceticism, their rejection of the noble or voluptuous subjects in which their greatest predecessors found inspiration. Their strikingly good paintings have had a strikingly bad influence on nearly all their most gifted juniors; and this is one cause for what I believe to be the alarming decline in recent art. (Am I gloomy merely because I am blind to the genius of the younger generation? This is an infirmity against which every middle-aged critic must be on guard. But when I ask the young which contemporary painters they most admire, the first names they mention are the same names that I should have mentioned thirty years ago. Does not this confirm my belief that painting is suffering at least a temporary decline? The First World War presumably killed in their nonage the artists who should now be the idols of the young, influencing them far more fruitfully than do our mighty, white-haired puritans.)

Many of my generation, I suspect, have found reason, as I have, to modify their view of aesthetics. I still hold that whether a picture is, or is not, a work of art depends in the first place upon its formal virtues; but I have become increasingly responsive—or increasingly conscious of my response—to the extreme value of the content conveyed by these virtues, to the character, sublime, charming or even informative, of the myths, histories, landscapes, nudes or individuals, as presented through the painter's vision. This change is no doubt partly due to Mr.



Berenson's nefarious influence. I follow him also in finding ominous the coincidence between the taste for the art of savage peoples and the lapse of Europe into savagery. Conspicuously beautiful in form as is much sculpture from Africa and the Pacific, how can we, living when we do, avoid being horrified by the truculence and base superstition it usually expresses? Blood-thirsty art can be savoured in comfort only when one feels secure from bloodthirsty men.

Asiatic by blood, American by education and citizenship, Mr. Berenson is nevertheless conspicuously European—in a sense more so than any of my other friends, whose specific Englishness or Frenchness or Russianness often overshadows what in them is generic to Europe. When he talks of 'we Americans', I am always surprised by a fact that I had forgotten. He seems immune from all national prejudices, except that he exaggerates, I think, the Jewish elements in Catholic Christianity. I call him 'Asiatic', but I have little faith in racial theories, least of all in any talk about the purity of Hebrew blood since the Diaspora. Greeks in Asia Minor, in Alexandria, in Macedonia, in Athens itself, adopted Judaism as well as Christianity. I wonder whether some of these are not among Mr. Berenson's ancestors. While he provides exquisite food for his guests, he is no less Spartan in his diet than Attic in his taste. In his ways of thinking, of feeling, of living, he is a Hellene.

Let me end with some lines from the poem in which Mr. R. C. Trevelyan dedicated to him a book of translations from Horace, Juvenal and Montaigne. They render, far more eloquently than could my prose, frequent longings that I share with many another.

And so my thoughts

Take wing and wander to far lands whither I now  
 May never go. But most I wish myself with you,  
 Dear friend, amid those cypress-wooded hills that mount  
 Beyond Vincigliata and quarried Ceceri  
 To where by San Clemente we often have seen .  
 Tuscany spread its grave and gracious landscape out  
 From Vallombrosa to the far Carraran peaks;  
 A vision of enchantment, a delight more deep  
 Than ever elsewhere spirit or sense may hope to know.

DENYS SUTTON

# THE CHALLENGE OF AMERICAN ART

A GENERALIZATION usually sure of success is that the artist withers and dies in the United States. It is a legend which recalls the one, so dear to past eras, of the English John Bull hostile to foreigners, ignorant and dissipated, stamping his way round the continent. It had certain elements of truth in it but that was all. Yet why has this present view of America become so widespread? The reasons are varied. Many visitors discovering that the American way of life is so different from their own, have assumed that it harms the artist. For their part, numerous Americans have preferred to live abroad finding a more congenial society in Europe than in America; they have embraced the tradition of expatriation with gusto. They have realized, and rightly, that in America the cultivated person or the writer is exposed to an exhausting struggle against the temptations of success and the dangers of commercialization. Yet though he may suffer he does not die; if anything, he may draw deeper strength from his isolation and exile.

Yet one may well wonder if the customary interpretation of the American scene is not oversimplified. Has not a radical alteration occurred in the artistic life of America, which Europeans, as well as Americans, would do well to realize? The situation of the man of letters in America has been fully dealt with by Mr. Spender in the pages of this review. What of the fine arts and the artist? How does the contemporary American, if we may generalize in such a shocking fashion, react to art? Do artistic movements exist in America which may be considered on an equal footing with those of Paris, London and Rome? Must we now look to New York in the same way as that city looked to Europe? These are questions which must be answered at a time when the cultural situation, no less than the political situation, has changed. America has now assumed, as everyone knows, a position of world leadership; military and economic power are concentrated in America's hands as they were in ours in the nineteenth century. Yet has this new status been accompanied by an assumption of spiritual or artistic

authority? Does the relegation of the Monroe doctrine to the past, the establishment of Marshall Aid and the increased interest in European affairs shown by the Middle West, suggest that an alteration has occurred or will occur in the climate of American culture and that this in turn will have consequent repercussions in Europe?

Cultural problems in America are complicated by the country's magnitude. It is a continent in which each district, each region, enjoys different particularities and reactions. It divides itself into a series of major cities each symbolizing a distinct attitude to life. To talk of the United States is really to speak of one's experience of New York, of Boston, of Washington, and Chicago. Though each city possesses its own intellectual life, New York stands out as the artistic and literary capital, a position it assumed only at the close of the nineteenth century. That this should be so was inevitable. Unlike other great central cities, New York is essentially polyglot. London or Paris have their own autonomy, yet they are English or French as well. New York is American in so far as it presents a cross-section of the nationalities that compose the country itself. It is a city composed of numerous smaller cities—Italian, German, Irish, Jewish, English—where travellers on the subway read newspapers written in their own language and printed in New York, but where the common tongue—English—is employed with difficulty and pronounced in a variety of ways. The polyglot nature of his background has destined the New Yorker to be an eclectic. He may rarely stir from his chosen district, but his own tradition, which is composed of so many different strands, has disposed him to examine those of others with equal interest. This awareness of the various elements in his racial or spiritual composition may explain why the New Yorker, and for that matter the American in general, is now eager to understand the problems of modern art. His quest has received an official imprimatur in the pages of *Life*. It has been attended with considerable controversy; the result has been to stir the public. That curiosity which has impelled innumerable Americans into lecture halls, has now been effectively kindled; art has become a popular topic.

Though the spectacle of culture-hungry Americans assisting at lectures and attempting to understand the reasons for particular artistic manifestations, may seem naïve, it is a humbling experience to discover that in the great American universities—Yale, Harvard, Columbia, or in the ladies' colleges—the history

of art is taught to undergraduate classes and that this is not the case in Oxford or Cambridge. In the past this lacuna was largely remedied by the Grand Tour, but our impoverished condition has unhappily restricted such jaunts. The American student is not only introduced to the art of the past, but to that of our own epoch: an attempt is made to explain and relate the history of such movements as Fauvism, Cubism, Dadaism and Abstraction which are vital for an understanding of twentieth-century culture. Inevitably few students retain more than a smattering of what they see, but at least they are able to view modern art backed, as it were, with the authority of an academic institution and with a decent objectivity. One result of this education will be the formation of an important audience for the arts, not least for the contemporary arts, amongst the upper and middle classes; it may entail a considerable increase in future patronage. In any case, artistic training has become a major consideration in American education and life. A museum is conceived not so much to preserve the objects in its possession as to present them in such a way as to convert others to the arts. For this reason, the organization and display of exhibitions has become exceedingly important. Though what at times is an almost histrionic quality lends a didactic note to aesthetic enjoyment, it does present a puritan people with a feasible approach to pleasure. It must not be overlooked that the attempt made by the State in our own country to patronize the arts and circulate exhibitions has warm supporters in America.

The American is not only cajoled into flirting with the arts by museums; he is most systematically invited to purchase works of art by the dealers. East 57th Street, New York, has become the hub of the art-dealing world, and the best pictures that money can buy are at the disposal of the collector. Though collectors still abound in Europe, especially in Switzerland, European dealers are induced to think in terms of dollars. Yet here we are faced with one of the paradoxes of the American scene. In Europe, numerous small collectors still survive who like to decorate their rooms with minor objects, a sketch by Degas, an English water-colour, a sixteenth-century Italian bronze. These objects not only possess artistic quality and charm; they create an atmosphere of intimacy. Such collectors are rare in America. The great collectors, a Bache, a Quinn or an Arensberg, certainly exist, but on the whole the

American has not the European's passion for possession. He has not perhaps a feeling for stability or continuity; unlike a Frenchman, he does not inhabit the same apartment for years. He is more likely to move from one city to another; in rapid succession his homes may be Chicago, Detroit, or Colorado. He is prepared to travel light because at bottom he is unable to suppress his desire for movement and expansion; he may be aware that perhaps he belongs nowhere. His attitude is determined by even deeper reasons. Despite his enthusiasm, he is reluctant to be carried too far by an emotion, yet his spontaneity impels him to proceed though too often he is restrained by a fear of the consequences. He is prepared to acknowledge that a work of art is interesting cultural material or that it is of sociological value, but to enjoy it for its design, form and colour, and to adopt a frankly aesthetic attitude poses other problems. His innate puritanism must be assuaged. After all, the superstition still lingers that to have artistic tastes is to be a 'cissy'.

The American amateur is further caught in a paradoxical situation on account of his mixed feelings of love-contempt for tradition. His approach to the past is curious and fascinating. It is often revealed in his attitude to Boston, which of all American cities is most felt to be incompatible with the general American way of living. Boston is conceived as eminently stuffy; its inhabitants possess that liking for formality which so many Americans bitterly resent. It symbolizes a way of life, based on tradition and on rule by an oligarchy which still continues today. The miracle has occurred in Boston, the home of the Brahmins, the Lowells, the State Street Trust, that the past is revered and is a reality. Boston is the capital of an aristocracy devoted to culture. Here, where the atmosphere of 1900 is so strong, the relevance of T. S. Eliot's line 'the women come and go, talking of Michelangelo' assumes full significance. The Public Library with its inscriptions to artists, writers and philosophers, Richardson's Trinity Church, the Hotel Vendôme, the red brick houses which recall Knightsbridge, form the background for a novel by Henry James or Edith Wharton, which is still in the process of composition. Tradition is not yet dead. It remains the proper home of the epigoni. Ezra Pound might write that the 1914 war was fought:

'For two gross of broken statues,  
For a few thousand battered books'

but for the Bostonian or the Cambridge resident, that 'old Bitch' civilization is a very poignant affair; it is a substitute for life. This spirit of elegant affection for the past is crystallized in Fenway Court, the former residence of Mrs. Gardner. Wealthy, talented and headstrong—her conduct was considered too daring by proper Bostonians—Mrs. Gardner lavished her affection on the construction of a Venetian palace and on the formation of a collection of Old Masters, mainly selected by Bernard Berenson, whose Maecenas she has been. Built to illustrate her enchanting hedonism—'mon plaisir' was her motto—Fenway Court is a shrine to her memory, with its patio filled with choice flowers. The ineffable presence of Mrs. 'Jack' herself—a figure from a Sargent portrait—is still present; somehow she succeeded in introducing a note of dash and Europeanism into the seriousness of nineteenth-century Boston. Her house and her attitude represented that concept of civilization and cosmopolitanism so dear to Americans of her era. Mrs. Wharton in full and determined progress across Europe, Henry James or Whistler dining out in London or Paris, Mrs. 'Wintie' Chanler and her circle in Rome, established a communion with their counterparts in Europe which was based on culture as much as fortune. They possessed an international spirit because they thought in such terms; they had none of that artificiality which marks a parvenu organization such as UNESCO. They paid immense devotion to the humanist ideals, to the Italian Renaissance; they were devotees of music. Their attitude is finally reflected in the novel and essays of Santayana, the eclecticism of Bernard Berenson and even in the poetry of Pound. Their aims were the discovery of a Nirvana (a spiritual home) and the enjoyment of a world culture. It was a superb ambition and broadly speaking, they succeeded. Who will deny that the plenitude of his experience, his ease of manner and determination does not make the nineteenth-century Bostonian as American as the realists Dreiser or Winslow Homer?

What of the other America, of the America painted by Edward Hopper and chronicled by Steinbeck? It is the America of the cinema, the petrol pump, the drug store and of mother and the little white house. It is the America of huge relentless cities, of the Studs Lonigans, where private enterprise is fierce and determined. It is the America where the bum and the crook rubs shoulders with the small-time inventor, with the pushing business man who

may still, even in these bad times, build a fortune. It is the land of the American torn between passion and puritanism, exercised by optimism and appalling pessimism and who, though verging on hysteria, remains eminently sensible. In a sense the Bostonian may be said to have resolved the problems of relationship; the city's sense of tradition enables him to know where he belongs. Elsewhere, in the other America, lies intolerable isolation, the world of the Miss Lonely Hearts. Its Nirvana is the bar; in front of its mirrors, reflecting their own presence, sit rows of solitary males, frayed yet eager to display their masculinity, hatted and melancholy with nowhere to go. Yet as W. H. Auden has perceived, such isolation enables the artist to reflect on his own situation and to face the essential problems of the century. In New York man is thrown sharply on his own resources; he is caught in the grasp of the machine age, crushed by skyscrapers. It was this experience, which Charlie Chaplin, coming from outside, was able to capture; it is the poignancy of the little man lost and forlorn. It is through the hot streets of this city that the American intellectual—one of the characters from Mr. Trilling's novel—passes, hunted in his imagination; at times he is almost tempted, one feels, to break into a run as if he were a figure in a Chirico painting.

Despite its rapacity, the city has a radiant brilliance reflected in a series of changing moods. It is this mixture of movement, light and brittleness which Marin caught in his water-colours; this sense of mechanization which inspires the paintings of Stella and Gleizes. They convey the feeling of surface tension suggested by the imposing bridges or by the intense energy of an industrial city. This dynamism supplies a reality to the new vision demanded by the artists and architects of the Bauhaus, by L. Moholy-Nagy and others. Something of this brilliant and pulsating quality is caught by Hart Crane:

‘Though the bound cables strands, the arching path  
Upward, veering with light, the flight of strings,—  
Taut miles of shuttling moonlight syncope  
The whispered rush, telepathy of wires.  
Up the index of night, granite and steel—  
Transparent meshes—fleckless the gleaming staves—  
Sybilline voices flicker, waveringly stream  
As though a God were issue of the strongs.’



Movement is an essential part of New York life. In a city which declines to sleep, life continues for twenty-four hours. The rush down the subway and the stream of cabs at certain moments, possess a touch of hysteria; at six or seven in the evening this movement becomes a crescendo: the streets are filled with people girating like marionettes. Then at autumn the last light at dusk will turn Central Park into a mysterious landscape or the headlights of a car will endow the shapes of the dock areas with a fantastic appearance. The division between the real and the unreal lessens; the mythology of the cinema is at work; these are the Gods and Goddesses that people the city. But there is always change. In the summer the view over the Hudson from a Riverside drive apartment endows the artificial city with a still greater fantasy; how typically American that the view should be cut by the antlike procession of cars as blinded with heat and dust they crawl, so it seems, out of a beleaguered city.

The orderly movement of the departing cars, seeking Westchester and the suburbs, typifies the neatly planned character of New York or Washington. The avenues intersected by numbered streets, in which memory is expunged by the digit, suggest the design of some vast factory. The maximum effect is placed on efficiency. All is concentrated on success so that the skyscrapers, the Cathedrals of American life, point to the skies their outstretched hands; they are the symbols of a great commercial empire. In some curious way, New York has something of the character of a Roman city. Both are monuments of civilizations which built roads and bridges. Both absorbed much from earlier cultures and worshipped power. Yet one may wonder if the possession of power also means that of culture. At the moment the audience for the arts has greatly increased in America, but to return to the problem felt so strongly by the European; can the artist survive in America? Does America and its life assist the arts in any way? It is particularly striking in America that many of the important contemporary problems, which are submerged in Western Europe or completely expunged in Eastern Europe are sufficiently apparent in America to permit discussion and demand solution. Academic freedom, for instance, is hardly a burning question in France or England. Broadly speaking, we can profess what political views we like and still teach. In America it is a vital question. To be a present or even a

past member of the Communist Party is to run the danger of losing your post. Once again the dominating question of the position of the minority appears in American life. Such questions bring the artist into immediate contact with the problems of relationships.

At a time when stability is disappearing, relationships, of the individual in regard to society, are fundamental in American and for that matter, European life. In America they influence the intellectual's position in a most decided manner. The question of how to manage relationships has possibly accounted for some of the characteristics of the Southern intellectual, of that line that runs intact from Basil Ransom in *The Bostonians* through Faulkner to Truman Capote and Tennessee Williams. Blanche du Bois in *Street Car Called Desire*, may not be much different from Miss Julie, but she has the additional torment of no longer belonging to her society. She has been passed over by circumstances. This problem, which is that of society at large, faces the writer. It is only now, for instance, that the English novelist, who is existing on the whole in a vacuum, has realized the implications of his situation: life in the collapsing society which was sensed by Edwardian novelists as different as George Gissing or Virginia Woolf. The contemporary novelist is unable to escape this situation; yet what is needed is not another Dickens or Thackeray to paint the panorama of events but a George Eliot or a Stendhal to dissect the moral dilemmas of the era as revealed in a general situation and a particular person. The analysis of the present reality is avoided by English novelists with the exception of Elizabeth Bowen and, above all, Henry Green, whose creative handling of time and space, and the central problem of authority, indicates a development of the novelist's range.

This problem of relationships contributes considerably to the flavour of American art at the present time. It is inevitable. It colours so much of life. So many relationships are matters either of the inhibitions or the frustrations of particular individuals in which conscience plays a part. The struggles that ensue recall in their intensity those of the Victorians and the recent comparison between Thomas Merton and Newman, though the quality of the prose and intellect is so vastly different, is not altogether inept. Thus, when it does come, liberation from fears and frustration is all the more intense. Yet together with the demands of the conscience has gone

the problem of freedom and, to a lesser degree, that of leisure. The puritan distrust of leisure will determine a student to devote his vacation not to study but to taking a job which will enable him to justify himself. Even those whose economic position permits them to live an agreeable existence of elegance and ease, feel unjustified and isolated. They are the rather lost figures who people the novels of Scott Fitzgerald; aloof and cut off. At the same time, there is not in America, as in Europe, the tradition of belles-lettres which enables the man of letters to move in society. On the whole, the writer or intellectual is restricted to the university campus and, since he often comes from a humble sphere, he is precluded, on account of American snobbishness, from mixing with the wealthy. Once again, the problems of minorities and of the caste laws of American society make themselves felt. The present situation has many disadvantages; it deprives the artist and writer of a more sustained patronage.

Once again as the pattern of American life is dissected, it is found to consist of innumerable minorities: the Jews, the negroes, the Irish, the intellectuals, all of whom coalesce to form the general culture. Yet such conflicts and divergences as T. S. Eliot has shown recently, help to determine the vitality of a culture. Tension and the desire to relax are two of the main themes in American life. They are in contradiction to the view of American life which places all the virtues on the solid traditions of existence, on Georgian colonial architecture and on the painting of Copley, Homer and Eakins. The other tradition is equally imposing and equally American; it includes Hawthorne and Poe; it is related to the romanticism of West, Allston and Ryder or the esoteric style of Whistler. It is an art composed to some extent of psychological conflicts. Unless we remember that its background is one of corruption and often despair, as in Faulkner, it is difficult to understand modern American art. It is an art which tends to emphasize analysis, not least that of conflicts. This tendency is even apparent in literary criticism; it is characteristic that some of the most exacting studies of Joyce have come from America and that the method of Cleanth Brooks and the 'new' school is devoted to the solution of paradoxes and details rather than the appreciation of general outlines.

The search for the meaning of meaning has much exercised the twentieth-century American. Gertrude Stein may have lived as

an expatriate but in the structure of her sentences, no less than in her attempt to break up words, and in reuniting them to express the inner sense of a situation or an emotion all the more clearly, she was very American. Though said to have disliked Cubism, she seems to have practised a sort of literary version of it. The lilt and flow of her words have a headlong rush characteristic of the formlessness of American art; their strength lies in gusto and the search for the value of an expression rather than in the precision of form. This struggle with words, and consequently with meaning, when words are so susceptible of interpretation, gives abstract thought in America its wordiness and fascination. It is a conflict reflected in American scientific phrasing and is the attempt, often exasperating to the European, to disregard nuances and discover an objective meaning for the most fragile emotion and experience. It proceeds from the firm belief that all experiences can be comprehended by all men. It is a conviction which renders it extremely difficult to believe in anything unconfirmed by reason. Hence the exciting battle in America between the upholders of materialism and spiritual belief and Neo-Pragmatism and Thomism.

This determined quest for meaning has placed the American in the vanguard of the modern movement. Ever since Paul Durand-Ruel established the French Impressionists in America, interest in contemporary art has been strong. Yet the struggle in America, as elsewhere, was arduous. The Armory Show of 1913, which contained some of the paintings shown at Roger Fry's 'Post-Impressionist' exhibition at the Grafton Galleries, including such celebrated works as Duchamp's 'Nude descending a staircase', now in the Walter C. Arensberg collection, opened the eyes of a hostile public. Much of the credit for the public's gradual conversion was due to the photographer and dealer Alfred Steiglitz, who introduced many European painters to America. He also carried the work of modern American artists such as John Marin, Weber, Dove, Demuth, and Maurer, painters whose honesty recalls the Camden Town Group in England. From the 1900s onwards the activities of Miss Katherine Dreier and the Société Anonyme, Mr. A. E. Gallatin, the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum and the W.P.A. projects of the thirties brought a varied selection of modern art before the public. Modern art met the needs, especially in New York, of a sympathetic public. The Museum of Modern Art has presented a wholly admirable selection

of the development of modern art, in a manner impossible either in Paris or London. In many ways, too, modern art has divided opinion. Art, as much as anything else, is tinged with the social conflict that inspires American life. The tradition and respectability of the Old Masters were proper for the homes of the Morgans and the millionaires yet they corresponded to a culture very different from that of the average New Yorker, one that he both envied and despised. He felt that in modern art he had an art which was his own; though deriving to a certain extent from the past it was essentially part of the new world of science and technology that formed his own background. Under these circumstances, the Museum of Modern Art has become more than a picture gallery; it is almost a club, a secret society. It is a symbol of youth, adventure and liberation. It recalls the Ibsenism of a past generation. That Miss Coplon should have met her Russian admirer there is characteristic of the age.

Though interest in modern art is certainly widespread, it has met with a strong opposition. This has recently been expressed with some force in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harpers* and the *College Art Journal* by Mr. Lincoln Kirstein, Mr. Francis Taylor and Mr. Lester Longman. They have variously felt that contemporary painting lacks 'adequate intellectual capacity and adequate manual skill' and that the artist must be more human communicating 'his meaning to others in terms of universal human experience'. Yet despite such criticisms America has produced an audience for modern art. Has it also evolved an art and a style of its own? Though a style is European or global in the sense of Baroque or Mannerism, a glance at, say, eighteenth-century America reveals that a style may vary from country to country within its general framework. Copley's portraiture in Boston is different from that executed in London. Much of the difference, as in 'The Boy with the Squirrel', lies in his use of light, or in the realism of his still life which anticipates that of David. It is a relationship which suggests not only formal but intellectual problems. Most American painting is connected in one way or another with European and there is no reason why this should not be so. Does American painting now relate to the main movements in Europe in the sense that Weber and Maurer looked to the Fauves and Cubists? Is there a central tendency in European painting or has the seat of artistic progress moved to America?

At any rate, European and American painting must be studied together. In Paris, the problems of artistic succession are vital. Though the old guard continue to paint with vigour, the younger men are hardly developing a new or valid approach. The cries which heralded the appearance of the Fougerson-Pignon group have subsided, though the assimilation of Cubism and Abstraction practised by Bazaine and Lopicque continues to merit attention. The main centre of interest, amongst the younger men, is on the future of abstract painting. Has it possibilities in Europe or will there be a different direction? The implications of the style seen in Nicholas de Stael's rich impasto and dramatic design of Hans Hartung's pungent shapes, rhythms and exploration of the unconscious. Abstract art in the sense of a divorce from the object is really a contradiction in terms; the best of the abstract painters create a painting world which is a projection of their own personalities. It is at its most powerful when expressing liberation from some particular theme or frustration; abstract painting is related, fundamentally, to the stream of consciousness. Just as much as the modern analyst of consciousness can point to the dream sequence in Oblomov or Dujardin's *'Les Lauriers sont coupés'* for prototypes, so the abstract painter can trace his origins from Bosch as much as from the colouristic tradition. All the same abstract painting seems to have reached something of an impasse in Europe. In our own country, the main movement of the war years, the Romantic revival, has come to a halt. Even Mr. Henry Moore has reached a moment of mannerism; his figures reveal the same solidity, the same search for formal values, but the spontaneity has become less. Talent abounds, ranging from Barbara Hepworth to Francis Bacon, but there is no evidence of the appearance of a new style. Where amongst the younger men are sculptors equal to Giacometti, Brancusi, Lipschitz or painters comparable to Picasso, Braque, Klee and Munch?

Is the situation the same in America? America certainly contains no individual artists as talented as the great Europeans and men such as Leger and Lipschitz, who have worked in America, tower over their contemporaries there. Yet though the majority of painters are still of secondary importance it is difficult to resist the feeling that the artist in America is filled with confidence and is about to scale the heights. The conditions are propitious; an audience is prepared. Like the country itself, styles in America are

extremely varied. Each has its particular defenders. The realist style, which include the Ashcan school or the social criticism of Ben Shahn, is still considered as the vital American tradition; it provokes memories of the frontier and of the rugged days of expansion. Equally typical of much that is American is the powerful Expressionistic current of the Jewish artist. Richly coloured, dramatic and tinged with melancholy, Expressionism has provided a vehicle for the gorgeous colours and introspective minds of such artists as Hyman Bloom and Jack Levine, whose work has the brio and dash of a Soutine. They reveal an attempt to express the essence of their own culture which is found equally in one of the most accomplished American painters, the negro Jacob Lawrence, whose elongated figures and broken rhythms of colour suggest the syncopation of jazz.

The American painter's eagerness to discover the essential qualities of his culture may result from his realization that his tradition is so recent. He has grown up so quickly and then, too, for many Americans there is the dim memory of other countries and cultures. In a country devoted to bright lights and success, he may betray a wistful desire to return to primitive life and to find a recompense for his materialism in the sophisticated peasantry of Chagall. America, in any case, has become the paradise of the popular painter, of the Sunday artist and the amateur. In painting, the little man may find an outlet and a consolation for the suppression of his individuality caused by the skyscraper or the monopoly. His painting is comparable to the flower on the window-sill of the tenement apartment. These naïve paintings, whether they are those innumerable portraits of pinched crabbed faces of men and women of the nineteenth century or of more imaginative scenes, as the 'Prancing Horse' or the richly ornamented paintings of Doriani and Hirschfeld in our own time, possess a certain poignancy. They may sometimes be no more than an expression of the dispossessed venting hurt feelings but they reflect the visual nature of so much American life. In America, the country of the cinema, of the mass magazine, of *Life* and *Time*, the image imprinted on the retina has immense importance. In this world where education is visual or spoken rather than written, the somewhat unexpected result has been an urge to expression in visual form.

This absorption in painting and cult of the primitive style may



be related in some respects to the American concept of innocence. The possibility that one may always *refaire une virginité* is natural to Americans as Henry James realized. They feel that whatever happens they may be preserved. This phenomenon may account for the almost startling acceptance of abstract painting in America. One of the most fascinating aspects of modern painting is that movements are accounted for by particular reasons. Just as the themes used by Renaissance painters or the bars and prostitutes appearing in Lautrec or Picasso have a meaning, so the very lack of subject in modern abstract painting has its implication. In a paradoxical sense it is as positive as 'L'absence' of Mallarmé. Its roots must lie in a particular concept. This is especially true of American abstract painting which corresponds, one feels, to something active in the traditions themselves. It can be related to that spirit of scientific inquiry which enables the artist, no less than the scientist, to feel that in his discovery of new worlds anything is permitted; his experiments with form parallel the new concepts of space-time.

Though the background of abstract painting still needs to be examined it can be seen that much of its qualities stem from the colouristic tradition of the Venetians, Rubens and the Impressionists. Its basis is a free use of colour but related, as Kandinsky showed, both in practice and theory, to definite emotions. Much of the result may appear scientific, yet the fundamental basis was one of immediacy. This spontaneity has been much sought in America. The paradox of the situation is that abstract art, which is one of freedom, and constructivism and that of the Bauhaus have flourished side by side. They are perhaps different faces of the same coin. In the same way, Leger and Mondrian have exerted a considerable influence in America. Yet in America, abstract art has a definite conception behind it, that of liberation. It verges on the therapeutic. You have only to enter the Museum of Non-Objective art with its piped music and soft carpets to feel a healing effect. A painting by Jackson Pollock, for instance, possesses two meanings: one in terms of pure colour and calligraphy in which the tones dance with the brilliance of the lights on a skyscraper and another in terms of the need to secure deliverance from certain images. The artist, whether a painter or sculptor, is in constant struggle with himself and his material. With sculptors such as David Smith, Herbert Ferber, Seymour Lipton, painters such as

Pollock, Ad Reinhardt, Loren McIver (or for that matter Maya Deren as in her brilliant film *At Land*) expression must be attained at all costs; and in this struggle with material and the depiction of an idea, a relationship with the expressionism proper of a Bloom is apparent.

The American artist has adopted abstraction for several reasons. Above all, as the semi-abstract painting of Marin or Knaths foreshadows, it is the one form of art which can have a meaning for him. It is an art which meets several of his requirements. It is divorced from tradition yet at the same time it provides a refuge from materialism. Perhaps the Thomist tendency in thought which is so strong in America may be reflected in abstract art, in a style which has an intrinsic value in itself. It is also an art which allows the painter to use his imagination in an unfettered manner, to compose a world of pure shapes and forms or one that is an expression of ideas. In using forms that are only remotely, if at all, related to known figures, he can divest himself of his self-consciousness; he can escape the complexities of his nature. Thus, an artist such as William Bazotes, following the example of Paul Klee, may plunge into an examination of the myths and symbols of his own consciousness relating the results with shapes and colours. 'There is always', he says, 'a subject that is uppermost in my mind. Sometimes I am aware of it. Sometimes not. I work on my canvas until I think it is finished. Often I recognize my subject on completion of the picture, and again I may wait a long time before I know what it is about.' The artist is aiming perhaps at the expression of a collective myth; it is American, again, in the sense that much of his production, like the prose of a Miller or a Wolfe, may seem formless.

Yet that this style, like language itself, is in the process of constant change must not be forgotten. The American student, for instance, has not, like his English or French counterpart, a language which is already a prepared vehicle. Language is a means of expression which he succeeds in conquering with some difficulty. Just as he has evolved out of language a new one which corresponds to his technological needs and is based on his dislike for elegance, so now he is attempting to evolve a new pictorial language permitting him to forget his puritanism and achieve the relaxation he craves. In the paintings of Rothko, for instance, the visual impact of an early Vuillard or Bonnard is suggested but

with the important difference that no theme is needed for such decorative expression. It is a medley of forms, created by colours which enjoy their own existence; their fragile fragrant qualities possess some of the atmosphere of an Oriental painting. It suggests that the theme of the relations between East and West, which Professor Northrup has examined in a recent book, is not without implications for modern painting. It is perhaps vital for a proper understanding of American art and culture that it should be viewed not only in terms of a country looking to Europe but towards the Orient as well. It was not fortuitous that more than any other artist Whistler should have captured an Eastern spirit in his painting. For American culture, whether we look at Emerson and the Transcendentalists or Henry Adams and John Lafarge, is heavily coloured with Orientalism. It is a tendency which has continued down to our own day; it is reflected in the superb Oriental collections at Boston, in the poetry of Pound, Amy Lowell, Marianne Moore, and the Imagists. It also appears in the painting of Graves and Tobey whose Orientalism is apparent in both the form and content of their art and in abstract painting itself.

Abstract painting bears relationship to the American scene in yet another way. It is a form of painting which is destined for space. From the days of Vanderlyn, Jarvis and others mural decoration has intrigued American painters. They have desired to emulate the painters of the Renaissance as can be seen in Puvis de Chavannes's commission to undertake murals for the Boston Public Library. Of recent years, this tendency can be distinguished in the W.P.A. project or in the New School decorations. Today, it is perhaps in America alone that a painter can still translate space, one of the most predominant elements in modern life, into plastic terms. For America is the country of architectural possibilities, where Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and Gropius are revered names and where experiments such as the glass house, built for Mr. Philip Johnson at New Canaan, Connecticut, are constantly made. If Herbert Read's contention that easel painting is doomed is in fact true, America still provides the possibilities of large-scale painting. The vast hotels and apartment houses of America demand a painting and sculpture that will suit such needs; and the combination of modern painting and sculpture has already occurred in a large Chicago hotel.

The conditions are prepared. Foreign artists have irrigated the

stream of artistic development; optimism abounds. And perhaps this feeling of the limitlessness of endeavour will direct the artist towards sculpture, where his monumentality can be more fully expressed. Some important work will result from the synthesis of the emotional quality of Lipschitz with the plastic tenderness of Noguchi, Smith, and Ferber. On the other hand it is typical of America that this sense of the machine age should be adopted, and, at the same time, mocked by one of the most intelligent American sculptors now at work, Alexander Calder. The world he has constructed out of steel is one of extreme delicacy, of the plant swaying in the heat of a New York apartment, but it is also one of private witticism, of poking fun at the art which he produces. In his delight in retreating inwards and laughing, rather than crying, he is as American as Scott Fitzgerald, Gershwin and Thurber. For the necessary counterpart to the irate seriousness of the American intellectual is the New York sophistication so ably represented by *The New Yorker* itself. For American art and literature are filled with paradoxes and contradictions; self-confidence is paralleled by inferiority complex; vulgarity by refinement; naïveté by sophistication; and lastly, the American lack of faith by a touching belief. But perhaps, above all, America is to be envied its possession of a metaphysic.



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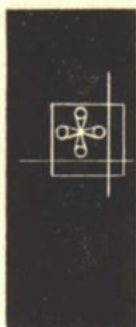
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